

Love Trials of the Introverted

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by Unlucky Roll (UnluckyR0ll)

[Non-Spoilers for anime-onlies. Also I've only read up to Vol 11 so please no spoilers for past that.] A romance story revolving around Suzune and Kiyotaka. You will see how these two introverted characters both come to care for one another despite both keeping their feelings locked away. How will these two make it through the school when they now both have a constant by their side with it being in each other. You can find the artist of the cover image at: <https://instagram.com/aubwei>

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Chapter 1

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My new life was getting ready to start and I couldn't help but feel happy despite my face looking the same as always.

Expressionless.

I was hoping to change that over the next three years. Surely by then I would find friends that I could laugh and joke with while making memories that will last me a lifetime.

Despite this I couldn't help but feel as if that will fail to come to pass. Is this the so-called Flag Phenomenon that I read about before attending the school? Did I just jinx myself and be doomed to be a loner for the rest of my school life?

Of course not. Because something like that can easily be explained away as a coincidence. Besides, humans love making connections and patterns when there are none. They make hundreds of connections a day in order to help make sense of the world around them.

Besides, wouldn't you want to think it was a connection when you thought about drinking a certain kind of soda brand in the morning then walking by a vending machine that has the soda you were thinking of in it. Then you're compelled to buy it because you're gonna think, "I was just thinking about this earlier. This was meant to be! I have to get it now."

The perfect excuse to splurge on something despite you making a connection to one of your random thoughts despite having hundreds of them a day.

After finishing my rant I turned my head towards the window to my left. I was lucky enough to grab a window seat and had the

privilege to watch the scenery blur past me uninterrupted.

However, something caught my eye as I was admiring the scenery. A faint reflection in the window caught my gaze and it was a girl who looked my age wearing the same uniform as me.

'When did she get there? Was I so lost in thought that I didn't register her sitting next to me?'

I soon began to focus on her reflection that was fixed to the glass that framed her as a painting being held in a museum. She had a beautiful face with striking eyes that seemed to be a striking purple but glowed a faint lavender in the light of the sun that happened to grace her features. She had long straight flowing black hair that would make the smoothest of satin fabric jealous.

I couldn't help but admire her beauty as she is definitely one of the most beautiful I've seen and seemed to be a cool beauty that was graceful and confident in how she held herself. This was obvious if the refined way she was reading the book in her hands was any indication.

'Hearts of Darkness, huh?'

Quite an interesting book to see a Japanese High School student read. One of the most influential books in the past 100 years and it originated in the United Kingdom. I wonder how she got her hands on that book, especially a translated version.

I was soon pulled from my musings as I heard a commotion on the other side of the bus.

"Don't you think you should give up your seat?"

I pulled my gaze from the window and by proxy the reflection of the beauty next to me and turned my head towards the sudden outburst on the previously quiet bus ride.

A few spots in front of me another girl that was wearing the female version of the uniform was addressing a young blonde haired man wearing the same version of the uniform as me sitting in the priority seat.

The blonde was exuding an air of superiority that was practically radiating off him as if he himself is the very concept of perfection with him believing every bit of it. He exudes enough cockiness and haughtiness for me to resolve myself in limiting interactions with him if possible. If I want to obtain the peaceful and fulfilled student life I desire it would be best to avoid him.

The two were soon intertwined in a battle of words and convictions with blonde hair unrelenting in giving up his seat for an elderly woman with the girl desperately trying to convince him otherwise.

I only continued gazing on unaffected, not willing to offer up my seat. I took a glance to my right to see what my seatmate's reaction would be and if she had any reservations about keeping her seat.

Once I did I saw that she still kept her eyes glued to her book unbothered by the argument that was taking place. As I was about to turn my gaze towards the window the eyes I previously spotted in the reflection of the window were now staring directly at me.

Her eyes had a gaze that would pierce through you like steel and would make a lesser person unnerved and frightened. However to me it only served to slightly ruin her beauty.

Her gaze was accompanied by her now frowning face. While her face beforehand could be described as anything but friendly, her current one could be noted as antagonistic with a side of disapproval. Despite this I held her gaze for a few more moments to take in her eyes and saw her eyes gain a steely edge to them due to me not shrinking away from her pointed gaze.

After a few moments I returned my gaze back towards the window without sharing a syllable of words with my seatmate. The previous blurred images once more returned to my vision as the situation that was playing out in front of me earlier was resolved when a salarywoman gave up her seat for the elderly woman.

As I was about to immerse myself in the changing scenery I caught the reflection of the girl sitting next to me again and saw that she was staring at me with a scowl.

'Did I offend her somehow? I don't think I did anything to offend her. Or was my face just so hard to look at that I ruined her day with my ugliness? Guess I will never know, especially since she returned her attention to her book now instead of talking to me.'

The bus ride continued uneventfully towards our destination with the highlight of the ride being the argument that happened earlier.

After a few more minutes the bus began to slow to a crawl signaling us arriving at our destination.

Everyone else on the bus that was also going to the school quickly began to disembark with a sea of red uniforms clogging the aisle of the bus. My seat partner seemed to either play it smart and not get caught up in the scramble or was in no rush to get to the school.

After a majority of the other students disembarked my seatmate closed her book and gracefully stood up with the grace of an olympic diver competing for a gold medal.

I swiftly followed her example and began walking behind her following her off the bus. I soon exited the bus and was introduced to the school entrance in all of its glory.

As I began taking in the view I couldn't help but feel slightly mesmerized at the fact that this was a high school, a very prestigious high school but a high school nonetheless. Despite standing before the entrance I can tell that plenty of funding went into this school with it rivaling a place I was intimately familiar with in scope.

With my last round of thoughts sobering me up and ever so slightly dipping my mood I took a step towards the maw of the metaphorical lion onwards to my new life.

"Wait a second."

Or that's how it should've gone until I was interrupted mid step which caused me to stumble slightly. Upon gathering myself I look towards who called out to me with the voice belonging none other to my seatmate from earlier.

"You were staring at me earlier on the bus. Why was that?"

I paused for a second noting how nice her voice sounded despite the edge that was in it.

"Sorry. I was just a bit interested. I was wondering why you didn't give up your seat earlier on the ride just like me."

"Yeah, I didn't want to give up my seat. What's so wrong with that?"

"No, it's just that I thought the same thing. I also didn't have any intention of giving up my seat."

"That's fine and all but did you have to stare at me? You didn't want to give up your seat either so I don't see how that leads to you staring at me as if you were trying to undress me with your eyes."

"I did no such thing. I was just admiring your beauty since I got caught up in your eyes."

"What made me say that? I never say something without preparing what to say beforehand, yet there I just blurted out what was on my mind at the time."

I slowly closed my eyes and prepared for the inevitable backlash that was sure to follow after my outburst.

However it never came.

I opened my eyes to the sight of the girl in front of me with her head turned with her hands at her side with one of her hands gripping the edge of her skirt. There was also a small and nearly unnoticeable blush on her face that I could barely make out due to her now having her back turned to me.

The conversation quickly ground to a halt with us now being blanketed in the presence of awkwardness after my outburst with neither of us knowing what to do afterwards.

My former seatmate suddenly looked over her shoulder and glared at me. However, instead of spitting out an insult which I was expecting to come from her she instead turned back around and

began walking into the school.

I stood there awkwardly dumbfounded at my first encounter of my new life going up in flames and crashing down in shambles so quickly.

I let loose a defeated sigh at my predicament before muttering to myself.

"Let's try and not burn any more bridges today huh Kiyotaka?"

And with those self-deprecating words of encouragement I began to trudge through the school grounds with my destination being the gymnasium which will hold my entrance ceremony.

My new life would then officially start. Hopefully it's still salvageable since I'm already working at a loss so far.

'Was it took much to ask for a peaceful and enjoyable school life? I sure hope not, or it's about to be a painful next three years.'

A/N: So this is my first fanfiction on here because this is the biggest place for cote fanfictions and it's been giving me brain rot ever since season 2 and 3 got announced. I look to implement elements from what I read of the LN into my story with it mainly being development between Kiyotaka and Suzune. Not sure yet on if I'm going to divert from the main story or carry on it but if I do carry on then I will explicitly warn the Anime watchers so you guys don't get spoiled because I wouldn't wish that on anyone since this series is so amazing. Anyways I hoped you guys enjoyed and look forward to the next chapter. I will warn you guys that I have a terrible track record with continuing my fanfictions but let's hope that this one will survive more than 5 chapters. Or make it past 1. Anyways enough of me rambling thank you for reading this and my story and I hope you guys have a good one.

Chapter 2

Reads: 4779 | Votes: 161 | Comments: 25

I was making my way towards the gymnasium which thankfully had plenty of signs throughout the campus pointing me in the right direction.

As I walked towards my destination I couldn't help but see large collections of students which I assumed to be upperclassmen scouting out the newer students.

This was easy to infer as they seemed to be in no rush to make it to the mandatory entrance ceremony.

I sped up my pace to make it towards the entrance ceremony quicker as I wanted to avoid any trouble that may arise.

While I doubt anything will happen to me, especially on the very first day of school, it is better to make it to the entrance ceremony and not gain any unwanted attention. That would be counteractive to me obtaining my peaceful school life.

I continued my trek for a few more minutes, easily finding my destination. When I made it to the gymnasium I was ordered into a line with other students and was situated at the back of said line. It seems my bus was one of the last ones to arrive.

The gymnasium was filled with the noise of the excited chatter between students getting to know one another. Seems everyone was already trying to make the most of their new school lives.

I began to take in the people around me to see if anyone caught my eye and saw something peculiar right next to me.

"Hello again."

My seatmate from earlier just so happened to be situated right next

to me with the line adjacent to my right. She stood there with her arms crossed over her chest with her eyes closed waiting for the start of the ceremony which then opened with disdain at recognizing me.

'I must've messed up really badly for her to look like she just spotted a cockroach in her kitchen when I addressed her.'

"Great not only did I have to deal with you and your perverted ways earlier but you're a stalker to boot. I should really get you expelled because ever since I encountered you earlier I've been fearing for the loss of my chastity."

"Oi, it's not my fault that we were both on the same bus with it being one of the last ones to make it to campus. It'd be weird if we didn't end up close to one another but it is regrettable that we were assigned so close to one another."

Her eyes narrowed at the end of my sentence and somehow the venom in her eyes multiplied by a factor of at least ten.

"The time for this entrance ceremony can't come to a close quick enough. The sooner I can get on with the school year and the quicker I can get away from you."

"That's pretty harsh don't you think? Besides what did I even do to offend you so much from what I can tell you got mad at me staring at you but I told you why that was. It was because I was curious why you didn't give your seat up."

"While yes you did answer my question, that doesn't completely absolve you. While you were staring at that time you were also staring at me beforehand. You were openly gawking at my reflection in the window for windows on end. You can see how I will feel threatened by this creep gazing at me for minutes on end."

'Ah she saw that, did she?'

"Ah you saw that, did you?"

'What's been wrong with me and not being able to hold my inner thoughts in today? Did I eat or drink something that had something

put into it because I never slip up like this, especially multiple times in a single day.

"Of course I did you deviant. You're certainly not the first person that has openly gawked at me. So why don't you apologize for your actions or should I bring up this incident with the school staff. I'm sure you'd love to have something on your school record on the first day."

The corner of my right eye twitched minutely at the threat that was casually thrown my way. However I was able to contain myself from firing back.

'No reason to try and throw away my new life before it even starts.'

I heaved a deep sigh before responding to the cold beauty before me.

"I am truly sorry for my actions and I'm sorry that we got off on the wrong foot. Hopefully we can put this behind us. My name is Kiyotaka Ayanokoji.

I extended my hand out towards her in a symbol of peace and camaraderie after I revealed my name.

Not only did I apologize but I was also able to extend an olive branch of friendship and ask for her name at the same time. Truly I have set the perfect trap for her to fall into so I can be on my way to making my first friend.

"..."

However, she did something entirely unanticipated, despite the fact that I should've predicted it based on the prior signs of her frigid demeanor. She just glared at me and didn't spare my open hand a glance. She then turned her head towards the stage as someone walked up to the podium on the stage of the gymnasium.

My hand floated awkwardly in the space between us and I brought it back to my side in shame. I gave a quick glance around and thankfully didn't see anyone who would've been witness to my utterly catastrophic attempt at making a friend.

I couldn't live down the embarrassment if this event became a recurring talking point surrounding me.

I let loose a depressed sigh and finally turned my attention to the podium at the front.

The entrance ceremony continued on with the principal of the school introducing himself while congratulating and welcoming everyone on making it in.

Despite a majority of people not looking anything special they all must be impressive students to make it into a school as prestigious as this.

'I wonder how proficient everyone is gonna be once school starts because surely there will be troublemakers but to what degree I wonder?'

The principal gave an abridged rundown of the school's rules and expectations before handing the mic off to an intense looking raven haired student who was introduced as the student council president.

He introduced himself as Manabu Horikita and was able to gain control of the atmosphere of the entire gymnasium with his presence alone. He held himself in a similar way to my perpetual neighbor.

Speaking of my neighbor I turned to look at her fully expecting a scolding later on for my actions.

However she stood there with anxiety clearly written over her face with a bead of sweat going down the side of her head. I saw one of her hands clench the end of her skirt.

'This is the second time now. Must be her nervous tick.'

My neighbor was fully engrossed in Manabu's presence and I couldn't help but ponder on if they knew each other. The first answer that I came to was that they were related, most likely brother and sister going by the similar way they held themselves.

Despite them being different genders it seems that the ice cold stare

runs in the family as it made it impossible to not connect the two due to the similarity in their facial structure and the way they held themselves while glaring.

Seeing the previously haughty and prideful girl that had plenty of barbs ready for anyone she looked meek and out of place. I couldn't help but be interested in this contradiction and how Manabu caused this.

'Was he abusive? Is it because she hasn't seen him in so long that she went into shock?'

So many possibilities could be the result of my neighbors current predicament but I had no way of finding out. Especially with the cold terms we ended on moments ago.

Yet despite this I once more reached out an olive branch.

"Hey, stay calm and breathe in for four seconds, then hold for seven, and then exhale for eight. It will help you ease up"

Despite her previously cold attitude she followed my directions and did as I said and she began to calm before me. Her body started to become more and more lax while her fists slowly started to unclench around the edge of her skirt after every full rotation of breathing.

After she gained control of herself she spared me a side glance and gone was the previous fridgidy that seemed to be a constant and was replaced with the slight glimmer of gratitude.

Her pride was obviously too high for her to do anything more but I counted this as a victory.

I turned back towards the student council president who seemed to be finishing up his speech and paid attention to the closing statements of his speech.

After he finished the previously quiet crowd began to resonate with small and respectful claps. I followed suit despite not paying attention or caring for most of the entrance ceremony and clapped along with my fellow classmates.

While clapping my thoughts couldn't help but turn to my neighbor once again.

'Why did I extend another olive branch towards her after she so brutally shut me down earlier? I guess it's because she's the only person I know so far and so I'm putting in the effort to befriend her.'

'But isn't this running in contradiction to me wanting to live a peaceful school life? I'm pretty sure I can befriend someone who wouldn't be as cold as her and easier to befriend. So the question is why am I trying so hard?'

My thoughts were cut off as we were soon dismissed to our respective classrooms with instructions that we would pick up phones that will be given to us outside the gymnasium.

Because of my position at the back of the gymnasium I was one of the first people to exist and thus was one of the first students to acquire our issued smartphones.

Upon being given one by one of the faculty I was instructed to insert my student pin that was assigned to me before school started and upon doing so my name flashed across the screen along with my class assignment. Soon my phone booted up with the screen now showing a screensaver of wet grass as the background with the time and date being displayed in front of the image.

I quickly pocketed my newly obtained phone and began walking towards the main building with intent to find my classroom for the year.

'Hopefully my time in the classroom will go better than my experiences so far at this school.'

A/N: I guess the brain rot is more serious than I expected. I hope you guys enjoyed this second chapter and I greatly appreciate all the votes and comments. I didn't think I would get this many impressions already but I guess this is one of the smaller fanfiction communities out there that I've written in so it shouldn't have been that big of a surprise. Regardless, I greatly appreciate it. And for those that commented it means a lot. One thing I've realized since writing is that comments are like crack to authors so the more you comment the more motivated writers are. Not that there's anything wrong with not leaving a comment but it does help you realize you're not just blindly screaming into the void when you post a story. Also starting on Monday updates will definitely slow down as spring break will end for me and college will start up again so it will be a lot harder for me to find time to write. Anyways sorry for rambling again and I hope to get another chapter out just as quick as this one but once again no promises. Once more thank you for reading and take care.

Chapter 3

Reads: 4148 | Votes: 149 | Comments: 38

Thankfully the hallways to the school were empty at the moment. The scope of how much money this high school had started to click when I realized that the current building I'm in was exclusive to first years. The same could probably be said for the second and third years.

The fact that each year had their own separate building that exclusively held classes for that grade was astonishing and further reinforced how far ahead this school was in comparison to other high schools.

The hallways were scarce at the moment however that was soon to change with everyone making their way from the gymnasium. I've never been more thankful for being a last arrival to something. It's surprisingly given me a boon which is avoiding the mass of students that are going to be filling these very hallways searching for their class.

When I made it inside the building at first there were a few people who made it there before me walking about and I was able to spot a map of the building on a wall a little past where the shoe lockers were located.

Thanks to this I was able to locate my classroom but upon looking at the map I found out something peculiar. We had a gymnasium on the bottom floor of this building along with bathrooms, a nurses office, and the teachers lounge.

On the second floor classes D and C shared the floor while B and A shared the third floor.

I soon found the door to my classroom with the nameplate 1-D sticking out on a plaque hanging from the wall beside the door. I

gave the door a once over as it was holding where I would spend my time learning and getting to know my fellow students for the next 3 years.

A small feeling of anxiety welled within me which stopped me from opening the door.

I soon began to hear a vast amount of voices on the floor below me signaling the arrival of the larger mass of students.

This was enough of a motivator to get me to open up the imposing door in front of me with a heavy sigh.

Upon opening the door the room was completely empty devoid of any life or activity signaling someone may have been here including a teacher.

I cursed my luck at being the first arrival as that will draw attention to myself being the first person in class. I debated turning around until the chatter of students began to get louder signaling the arrival of students on this floor.

'I really have to commit now or else it will look even weirder if I were to walk out of the class after finding it. Plus this might be better than showing up to class with most of the people there already and they all look to evaluate the new arrival.'

I looked around the room seeing nothing to indicate what we should be doing upon arrival and so I turned my vision towards the nearest desk to me which held a name upon it on the top right engraved with a metal into the desk.

'Sudo Ken'

'I guess this is the name of one of my soon to be classmates.'

I began to walk down the line until I reached the end of the row and found my name on one of the desks.

The desk was located at the very back of the room in the back left corner. Perfectly fine by me as it will give me a good vantage point to gauge the rest of the room and away from the majority of the

class.

Truly this was the perfect spot to live a peaceful school life seeing as how I would only need to make friends and be acquainted with at most two people with them being my seatmates.

I walked over to my desk and settled my school bag in the cubby provided by my desk and sat down in my seat with a contented sigh at my lucky desk placement.

"Well this is an unpleasant coincidence."

My good mood was instant shattered as I turned my head to my right to see once again the girl from earlier. I could only let out a sigh at my predicament before responding.

"You know you could at least try to be cordial with me especially since we're going to be seatmates for the year. I have no intention to needlessly antagonize you and I'd appreciate it if you were the same."

"Why should I be cordial with someone who's caused me nothing but trouble since I've met them?"

All I could think about at that moment was, 'The nerve of this girl.'

My mind immediately went back to the entrance ceremony when I helped her calm down when she was clearly at her wits end and yet she continues to antagonize me.

"I've already apologized for my earlier actions and I'm looking to have a peaceful school life so why don't we put this behind us? We can just start as if this is our first meeting and we can be strangers once again."

While I was putting my case forward to the prosecution the girl sat down at her desk with the poise of an aristocrat and settled her bag in her desk cubby.

The girl before me seemed to ponder my words for a few moments and mulled over what I said and while she was going over the pros and cons her head did a slight nod to the left.

The action was undeniably cute with her hair slightly swaying to the right side of her face and covering a small portion. The girl soon came to an answer and majestically tucked the impending hair behind her hair in a practiced motion.

"I suppose there is some merit to your proposition and be thankful as I will accept this outcome and forget the harassment that you subjected me to earlier today."

Upon finishing her words she gave her head a slight nod in acknowledgement and then reached her hands into her cubby. I could hear the sounds of objects moving around in her school bag and the book she was reading from earlier *Hearts of Darkness* was swiftly revealed.

In order to not get caught in the same situation as earlier I turned my head towards my section of window that took up the entirety of the left wall of the classroom.

As I was about to begin daydreaming a soft voice resonated from my right with the voice having a delicate yet firm touch to it.

"Suzune Horikita. "

"Huh?"

I could help but mutter as I turned my head over to the now named seatmate who was nose deep in her book hiding her face. As I was left dumbstruck I glanced over at my seat partner and saw the tips of her ears being tinted red. I wasn't even sure if I was seeing it correctly however as the light from the window was shining right on her and her ears were mostly being hidden because of her hair.

The now named Horikita suddenly put the book on her desk revealing her face which was now holding her usual scowl in place along with her usual intense gaze leveled at me.

"Don't act too surprised you passed my desk on the way to yours so you surely saw my name on the desk. Unless maybe you are so incompetent that you forgot the name on the desk adjacent to yours that quickly? Should I be worried that my seatmate has the mind of

a goldfish?"

"No, I remember the name when I was looking for my desk. I thought it was a very beautiful name when I read it. I was just surprised that you gave me your name. You seem like the type that would happily go on through the entire year without giving your name away if you could help it."

I saw Horikita freeze for a moment at my first comment before the scowl and came back full force moments later.

"You are right I would happily go without anyone knowing my name but a certain seatmate of mine sought to ruin my plans. With a personality like yours you seem like the type that will remain friendless for the rest of the year."

"Wha-"

"And no I will not be your friend. You barely count as an acquaintance to me and I have no need for friends, especially ones as socially and academically inept as you."

"Isn't that just the pot calling the kettle black?"

"The fact that you even think that we are close to the same level academically is a blatant insult that I will ignore thanks to my benevolent nature. Also don't get it wrong I choose to have no friends by choice while you are desperately seeking them out if your attempts to communicate with me have been any indication."

I was about to respond but our conversation was cut short by the door opening with a slam with a mature woman walking towards the podium situated at the front of the room.

'When did the classroom fill up with the rest of the students? I could've sworn the classroom was only empty a few moments ago.'

As the woman began to settle in at the podium I couldn't help but think about how despite my seatmate being a beauty she had a rotten personality to perfectly contract her model like looks.

Suddenly I felt a shiver run down my spine at an approaching

danger that sought to turn my normal school life away and far from reach.

"You were thinking of something rude just now weren't you?"

The devil seemed to have come to take his due early and he sought fit to denote it to one of his finest prodigies. The devil next me glared so hard at the side of my head I could feel it piercing into me.

I soon heard the sound of her bag rustling once more and then a sudden sharp pain spread through my side. I looked down in horror to see a precision compass jabbed into my side.

I was about to react in one of the most violent ways possible that was sure to gather the attention of the entire classroom.

"Ow"

A soft pitiful murmur escaped my mouth as I began to rub my assaulted side while the soft snickers of my seatmate rang in my ear.

The fact that the snickers sounded just as soft and innocent as her voice when she told me her name only added salt to the already stinging wound.

'It's gonna be a long three years isn't it?'

A/N: Yeah I have no idea what's wrong with me. I don't know

why I've been writing so much and if it hasn't been clear already I write these out in an hour or two. I will most likely go back and edit these early chapters to make them flow better and create better dialogue/exposition later on when updates become slower. But until then enjoy this unprecedented amount of content I am giving you since I'm on a roll and I want to keep it rolling until writer's block inevitably hits me. Anyways thanks for reading and take care.

Chapter 4

Reads: 3913 | Votes: 141 | Comments: 27

After the near fatal attack on my life I turned my attention to the front of the room where the woman that walked in earlier finally settled herself at the podium.

"Ahem, good morning new students. My name is Chabashira Sae and I am in charge of class D this year. I teach Japanese history. This school doesn't rearrange the classes every year, so over the next three years, I hope I get to know all of you. Best regards. I will now distribute the list of special rules of this school and the matriculation guide."

At this school, there are special rules that make it different from every other high school. All students are required to live on campus, and are forbidden from contacting anyone outside the school.

Even contacting immediate family is impossible without the permission of the school.

Leaving school grounds is also forbidden.

Of course I already knew this. It was the main reason I picked this school in the first place. The perfect environment for me to live a relaxing student life.

There's one more special characteristic of this school, though. The introduction of the S system.

"Earlier you should have received phones. However they also act as your student ID. So be sure not to lose them. You can buy anything from any of the shops and facilities around campus. It works like a credit card. However, be careful of how many points you use. There's nothing you can't buy at school. If there's something on

school grounds, it's purchasable."

In short the point system replaced all forms of money from the school except for the allocated points that we are given.

This way everyone coming to this school will start off the same. Kids coming from foster care or heirs of the largest billion yen companies will all be put on the same playing field.

Truly intriguing that the school goes so far to level the playing field.

"Student cards can be used by swiping them on the machines. Using the machines is really easy, so you won't have any trouble with them. The points will be automatically credited on the first day of the month. Everyone should already have 100,000 points on their card. Also, 1 point is worth 1 yen. Any more explanation is unnecessary."

The room exploded in noise at the announcement and I don't blame them. 100,000 yen is no small amount of money. This means every student attending has a 100,000 yen allowance a month.

With 40 kids in each class and there being 4 separate classes spread among 3 grade levels that would mean the school gives out...

"48,000,000 yen a month?"

I couldn't help but mutter the total under my breath as that amount of money being given to students as an allowance went into the area of too large to competently comprehend.

That's the kind of money that you hear about and dream of owning while thinking up elaborate ways to spend the money.

'And the school can just afford to give this out every month?'

"Hm?"

I slightly turned my head to see Horikita looking at me while raising a questioning eyebrow.

'She must've heard me earlier huh? I should really try and stop my

muttering from becoming a habit. It would be detrimental if this continues. And should I tell her my suspicions or should I keep it to myself?"

Before I could deliberate on the matter further, Chabashira-Sensei continued talking.

"Were you guys surprised by the amount of points given? This school measures the abilities of students. Everyone here, who passed the entrance exam, has shown some level of merit and worth. The amount of money is a reflection of your skills. Use without holding back. After graduation, however, all the points will be taken back. Since it's impossible to change these points into cash, there's no point in saving up the points. How the points are used are up to you. Use it on things you like or need. If you feel that there is no use for some of your points, you can always transfer them to someone else. However, bullying other people for points is prohibited. The school is very strict on matters concerning bullying."

Finishing the explanation Chabashira-Sensei gazed around the room before leaving one final message before she swiftly exited the classroom.

"It seems like no one has questions. Well then, please lead a good student life. You may leave the classroom and return to your dorms. Today was only a day of introductions. School officially starts tomorrow."

Going by the amazed mutters and excited chattering my fellow classmates were astounded by the size of our allowance.

"You also seemed to grasp the absurdity of the generosity of the school as well. Maybe you're not a lost cause after all Ayanokouji-Kun."

"What's with the sudden use of my name? You were so against even being near me a few minutes ago so what changed?"

"I took pity on you and I deemed you not a complete lost cause of intellectual conversation since I was able to spot a speck of value in

you."

"Despite your foul words there was a compliment hidden in there so I appreciate it and I'm glad to see you're finally opening up."

"You must be a sadist. Seems like my first evaluation of you being a pervert wasn't far off from the truth?"

"Oi, didn't we agree to leave that in the past? And I've had so few friends that the smallest of compliments mean a lot to me, so I would appreciate it if you allowed me to enjoy this moment."

"I pray that the school has social interaction courses because it looks like you would need a tutor with how lacking you are in that department."

"Would you do any better?"

"Of course I would. I don't fail any task set in front of me and just because I decide not to socialize doesn't mean I'm completely inept and incompetent like you."

"If your social skills are half as sharp as your tongue then I can see you passing with flying colors. But I doubt that is the case."

"Oh? Finally grown a backbone have you? While I would applaud you on your rapid progress on upgrading from the doormat status you have, I can't allow you to get away with such an insult. Therefore you will accompany me later when I go shopping for essentials and you will pay for me."

"How is that even fair in the sli-"

The trademark Horikita glare was leveled at me which prompted me to shut my mouth.

'Speaking of glare should I ask if she's related to the student council president?' Actually what am I talking about? The answer is pretty obvious isn't it? The real question is when is the right time I can broach the subject without having my questions shut down or gaining another scar in my side.

In the end I just let loose a miserable sigh from my lips and sold my soul to the devil and gave her my agreement.

"Just go easy on my wallet please."

She gave me a cruel smirk that was heralding the encroaching decimation of my wallet.

The commotion at the front of the room soon caught my attention as a good looking student was standing up at the front of the class and taking control of the previously chaotic atmosphere that engulfed the class.

"Starting from today, we will be in the same class for the next three years. So, it would be great if all of us could introduce ourselves and become friends. We still have time until the entrance ceremony, so what do you think?"

Oh... he said something amazing. A majority of the students couldn't find words to say.

"I agree! After all, we don't know each other's names, let alone anything about each other."

After the first person agreed, the previously hesitant students subsequently voiced their support.

"My name is Hirata Yousuke. Because I was often called by my first name, Yousuke, in middle school, feel free to use my first name. Although I like all sports, I like soccer in particular, and also plan to play soccer at this school. Please take care of me."

The young man who proposed that the class introduce themselves smoothly and impeccably did his self introduction.

I can help but be impressed with his confidence. His popularity and class standing easily skyrocket to the top with how easygoing and nice he seemed along with participating in sports.

In the blink of an eye Class D had a central figure that would be the lifeblood of the class.

'And then he would probably go out with the cutest girl in the class. That's probably how things will end up.'

I couldn't help but glance at Horikita out of the corner of my eye after my errant thoughts. She has chosen to ignore the current conversation and went back to reading with a neutral expression on her face while doing so.

"Well, if that was satisfactory... then, can we start self introductions from the beginning?"

Being smooth to the very end, Hirata asked for confirmation.

And so introductions for the class carried on with some students having better introductions than others. Some stumbled over their words while others proudly stated their likes and wanting to get along.

The order of students went from those wanting to introduce themselves as soon as they could to those wanting to put off introductions until the last possible moment.

As introductions rolled along one person caught my eye. It was a cheerful girl with short shoulder length hair who I identified as the girl that helped out the old woman on the bus this morning.

"My name is Kushida Kikyuu, and since none of my friends from middle school came to this school, I want to get to know everyone and become friends!"

Most students finished their greetings after a few words, but Kushida continued to talk after hers.

"First of all, I want to become friends with everyone here. After all of you are done with your introductions, please exchange contact information with me!"

Her words weren't just words. I could tell immediately that she was the type of girl to open up her heart immediately. Yet I couldn't help but feel insincerity from her words.

That would be something I would have to watch out for. Especially

since she seemed the type of person who would get along with everyone.

"Then, during vacations or after school, I want to make memories with many people, so please invite me to many events. I've been talking for a while, so I'll end my self-introduction here."

She'd definitely get along with all the boys and girls in the class.

Before I knew it my turn for introductions were rapidly approaching.

'Should I try to be funny perhaps and crack a joke? No, that's a bad idea. The only punchline resulting from that would be my lackluster delivery.'

"Then, the next one is□□□"

As Hirata looked at the next student, the next student shot him a sharp glare.

With bright red hair, the boy looked like a delinquent and spoke in a manner that matched his appearance.

"You guys idiots? I don't wanna introduce myself, just leave me alone."

Red hair glared at Hirata. Tension hung in the air.

"I can't force you to introduce yourself. But, I don't think that it's a bad thing to get along with your classmates. If you thought I was being unpleasant, I apologize."

After watching Hirata bow his head towards red hair, some of the girls glared at red hair.

"Isn't it fine to do a simple self introduction?"

"Yea, yea!"

As expected from the ikemen soccer boy. He seems to have quickly attracted the attention of the girls.

However, starting with red hair, about half of the other boys stirred with jealousy towards Hirata.

"No. I don't want to pretend that we're good friends."

Red hair got up from his seat. At the same time, several other students left the room. They probably had no intention to get to know their classmates. Horikita also started to get up from her seat.

She looked in my direction, and raised an eyebrow towards me with the obvious question left unsaid.

'Are you coming or what?'

I hesitated with what to do. On the one hand I want to introduce myself to the class to try and sow the seeds towards making friends with those still in the class. However, on the other hand I did agree to accompany Horikita.

While I doubt any kind of friendship will develop between us I would rather stay on the good side of the person who can assault me in class with ease.

With a heavy sigh I stood up and followed Horikita out of the room.

'And there goes one of my best chances at making friends. Truly there is no hope for me in my endeavor is there?'

A/N: So yeah as of writing this I have exactly 69 votes on my story so far. Nice. I highly appreciate the support I've gotten on this so far. And I will appreciate some feedback from you guys on this chapter. In all the previous chapters I kept the content

mostly original with me grabbing a line or two from the book. Would you guys prefer it to stay that way or did you like this chapter better where I weaved multiple lines of the LN and Anime in the story along with my original work. Anyways I appreciate your guys feedback on this and it's not required if you guys don't want to so no need to do so if you don't want to. BTW the first chapter was meant to release on the 18th instead of the 19th so while it looks like I'm a psychopath and dropped 3 chapters in a day it was only 2. Say thanks to Wattpad for screwing up my publishing lol. And with that this will be the last chapter of me writing during spring break so let's hope this story continues when I also have college to deal with. Thank you for putting up with my rambling once again. Thank you for reading and I hope everyone takes care.

Chapter 5

Reads: 3699 | Votes: 153 | Comments: 51

Upon exiting the classroom and following Horikita I couldn't help but hear whispers coming from the classroom as I was leaving.

After leaving like the others they're more than likely gossiping how we were all rude which will severely hamper any hope I had of making friends with those in class. While there may be an opportunity to befriend someone it will be unlikely.

Those who stayed in class will most likely bond over being the ones who stayed in the classroom and comment on the rudeness of everyone that left. That doesn't include the fact that Hirata and Kushida stayed in the classroom and they will without a doubt in my mind befriend everyone there together and foster a sense of friendship.

Meanwhile I was stuck on a metaphorical leash and had to follow Horikita. Speaking of Horikita, she was moving with a poised grace and was unflinching in her steps. She walked with a purpose and intensity of someone who was resolute in where they were headed.

Seeing as she began leaving as soon as I stood up and she was still a few paces ahead of me I sped up my pace and then began to match her strides when I made it next to her.

"So where do you intend on dragging me? It's barely noon so you have the rest of the day to theoretically drag me around but I would appreciate it if we could finish early so I can settle into my dorm room."

"Are you so opposed to spending time with me that you want our time together to end so fast? I'm truly hurt by the lack of tact that you would do something so brazenly in the face of my generosity."

"You know I might've actually believed you just now if you didn't say that with a scowl on your face while glaring at me."

"Oh? That's what gave me away? I would've thought the sarcasm in my voice was the most obvious but I suppose you are socially inept so I shouldn't have expected you to tell the difference between the change of inflection in people's voices."

"Just because I didn't give a complete rundown of the situation doesn't give you the right to nitpick what I didn't notice you know."

"I'm just giving my opinion so I don't see why I shouldn't speak my opinion and I stand by my opinion which is you are the most socially inept person I've met."

"Not saying a lot when I'm probably the only person you've interacted with besides a teacher in the last 10 years."

Horkita swooped in front of me, halting us dead in our tracks, her face flushed with rage as she glared at me.

However as she opened her mouth to spew out some sort of protest or insult it was cut short as someone pushed their way in between us as she was trying to talk.

Despite being saved from a scolding I couldn't help but feel a morsel of anger flare up for a second before it was quickly extinguished as if it was never there.

"Fufu~ you should feel grateful to be touched by a perfect being such as I. You two lovebirds should be grateful for my patronage but next time try not to block my path because I will not halt just as I did just now."

The haughty deliverance of those words was the best indicator of who just pushed past us and upon looking in the direction of where the person would be walking it was exactly who I thought it was.

It was the blonde haired student from the bus who I also spotted in my classroom. I gave him no mind at the time but upon seeing how he's acting now and how he acted earlier it's going to be a pain to have to deal with him for the next three years.

My companion beside me seemed to agree as her anger was now directed at the blonde hair who was already too far away for anything we say to reach his ears.

Horikita stood beside me fuming with anger at the rudeness of blonde hair and her hands were soon formed into fists that were clenching and unclenching in anger. I viewed her enraged frame for a few moments before an idea came to my head. It was a dumb one but it was the one that I thought best to calm the situation and so with a small sigh I proceeded with my actions.

"Just ignore him and let's get on with your errands."

While I urged her forward with my words I took her hand in mine and began walking forwards towards the exit of the building. When I felt my hand envelop her I felt it tense up slightly before it relaxed a moment later. It stayed like that for a few heartbeats before her hand was violently wrenched from mine.

"I would appreciate it if you would not touch me without my consent. You're doing a very poor job in convincing me you're not a pervert. What would even possess you to grab my hand in the first place."

Despite the hateful words being thrown my way the effect of them was significantly diminished by the red hue that was currently engulfing her face while she struggled to make eye contact with me when I turned to face her.

'She looks rather cute right now. I wish she was like this more often, if she was she was sure to be one of the most popular people here at school.'

I tilted my head slightly at her words while continuing to stare at her who was still squirming under my gaze. She would glance all around me without staring at me directly and was trying her best to meet my eyes. Eventually she did and when she did so her eyes immediately shifted to look somewhere else while her face somehow became even redder while her ears started to turn the same shade of red.

Instead of responding to her words or pushing this any further I decide to give her a break but give her an escape from this situation.

"Shall we carry on? I don't think we're gonna get anything done at this rate by standing here. Lead the way since I don't know where you want to take us."

Without responding she pushed past me and stopped a few steps in front me with her head turned away from me.

"Yes, let us continue on. I hate the idea of wasting time as well.

With that our journey continued on in silence between us with Horikita keeping the distance in front of me. Horikita's face slowly began to lose the red hue over time and when she stopped feeling her burning face and regained her composure she glanced over her shoulder and gestured for me to walk beside her.

'Even in a situation like this she still finds a way to hold onto her pride by making me catch up with her huh? You're quite the interesting person Horikita.'

Without wanting to set her off in any way we continued on walking together in silence. After walking the campus together we made our way in the direction of the dorms and we came across a Konbini.

"Let's go in here. I would like to grab ingredients to make for lunch tomorrow at school along with necessities."

Without waiting for my response she proceeded to walk in unperturbed and left me momentarily standing dumbfounded in the entrance of the Konbini. I was finally spurred into action as the automatic door that let Horikita in began to close in front of me.

I hurriedly walked through the closing door and made my way inside to the store.

The store was rather small with it being slightly smaller than my classroom. Among the many shelves was a variety of goods with it ranging from candy, snacks, premade meals, and even toiletries. There was even an area that housed kitchenware plumbing utilities.

"This place has everything."

"Why are you so awestruck? Don't tell me this is the first time you've ever been to a Konbini. I worry that you must've been raised in a desolate shack in Hokkaido. How did you even make it to this school, Ayanokouji-kun?"

"You know I want to smile at having such a beautiful girl say my name but you always say my name in such a mocking way that it diminishes what joy I would derive from it."

"I'm rather impressed. I didn't think you could actually read the inflection in people's voices. It hasn't improved much but my opinion of you has improved ever so slightly."

"And it doesn't have to do anything with the compliment I gave you?"

"I decided to ignore that comment especially seeing as I already know about my superb looks and I don't need you reminding me about it."

Despite saying this with her chest full of pride, Horikita turned her head away from me as she was talking and began to look through the shelves full of items.

I decided not to point out how her face held a subtle tinge of red to it now and turned my attention to the shelves as well. Before I could get a good look at what to think about buying a basket was suddenly thrust into my arms.

"Here hold on to this."

Immediately after giving me her instructions she began to pile a bunch of cheap toiletries into said basket while intriguingly putting in two of every item.

"What do you think of the S-Point System Ayanokouji-kun? Seems awfully altruistic of them to offer us free items despite giving us an allowance of 100,000 yen."

"It does seem rather unusual but the school is government funded so

they do have plenty of money to wave around. The fact that the school has its very own mall and multiple shopping centers spread throughout campus is rather telling of the wealth put into this school."

"Hm, I suppose you're right but it still feels like they're being far too generous."

"Maybe they've had students use all of their allowance in a month before and so they have these as counter measures so you don't turn into a vagrant living on campus."

"I suppose that's true, and I would rather everyone have access to soap and shampoo because I wouldn't be able to stand the smell of irresponsible tennagers trying to make it to the end of the month."

Horikita then moved onto the food section and peculiarly walked past the premade meals. She instead went to the fresh food section and began picking up individual ingredients and putting them in the basket I still had in my arms.

She continued grabbing random ingredients with focused movements through the Konbini.

"Do you like Karaage Ayanokouji-kun? I was planning on making myself a bento for tomorrow and was planning on making you one as well."

"Huh?"

I couldn't help but let out an idiotic response but how was I supposed to react. The usual cold and distant Horikita just asked to make a homemade lunch for me.

"If you're just gonna stand there and gawk then you must have no need for food tomorrow since you must already have something figured out."

"Uhh, no no no, you got it wrong, I would really appreciate it if you would make me something for tomorrow. I was just surprised since I just expected to accompany you while you were shopping."

"Are you daft? Do you think I was grabbing two of everything from toiletries to ingredients just to buy it all for myself. All I said earlier was that you were gonna pay for me when I went shopping. I never said anything about you getting anything for yourself. Since you seem incompetent when it comes to the most basic of things I decided to just grab the same things I grabbed for myself for you as well."

"That was rather thoughtful of you Horikita-san. I wish you would act like this more often so I don't have to fea-"

She fixed me with a glare and cut me off from digging an even deeper hole for myself.

"I apologize."

My apology was accompanied by a soft 'hmpf' and mutters that were far too quiet for me to hear.

After gathering everything she needed we then made our way to the front and made it to the cashier and put all our items on the table to be scanned. After everything got rung up Horikita looked at me with an expectant gaze which only served to demoralize my spirit.

"I would be upset and say you're doing this to me after all we've been through, but I'm more hurt by the fact that you are so willing to harm my poor Wallet-chan."

"Just stop acting like a child and pay for everything already."

A tired and angry sigh accompanied her words and I reluctantly held out my phone to the scanner which then resonated a ping moments later along with the scanner indicating the completed transaction.

I couldn't help but stare at my phone in wonder when I pulled my hand back and muttered out my thoughts.

"It really does work like money."

"It is rather impressive that the whole school is built on this concept."

We began to bag up our items with us having four bags in total carrying both halves of our toiletries and two bags exclusively for the gathered food ingredients.

~Break~

"Why am I tasked with being the pack mule again? Shouldn't you at the very least take the bag filled with your toiletries."

I couldn't help but voice my thoughts as we made our way towards the dorms after leaving Konbini.

"It's just the expected thing to do of a proper man. Don't tell me you'd be so rude but to subject a maiden like myself to carrying all of the items when you can do it yourself."

"Doesn't mean you can't take at least one bag."

"You already have everything sorted so I see no reason to interrupt you in your task."

"Are you just saying this because you'd be too tired to make it back to the dorms after carrying one of the bags."

"So you've run out of arguments and you resort to a childish dig used by kids on the playground. I'm not very impressed to say the least."

My rebuttal was halted short by us arriving at the dorm building. As soon as we walked in it was filled with students mingling together in a common area of the dormitory. We both made our way through the floor and found the elevator and got in together.

Horikita pressed the button for the thirteenth floor while I pressed the button for the sixth floor.

The ride passed by in companionable silence with both of us tired from today's events and wanting to relax in our dorm rooms.

Before I knew it the elevator dinged and opened up to the floor I was on. I stepped out of the elevator with my right foot in the door divider preventing it from closing and began to give Horikita all but

one of the bags on my arms.

I removed my foot and backed up and the previously comfortable silence turned awkward as we both stared at one another without saying a word. I tried to find some way to see her off but nothing came to mind.

'We made conversation easy together throughout the entire day, so why is this different?'

The awkward stare down between the two of us carried on until the ding of the elevator came back signaling the shutting of the doors.

As the doors began to close I was finally able to blurt out a farewell to Horikita.

"Have a goodnight Horikita-San."

Right before the doors closed I heard a soft voice reply back to me.

"You as well Ayanokouji-Kun."

With that the door to the elevator shut and began traveling to the upper floors with a low hum that began to get further and further away.

After staring at the elevator doors for a few moments I turned my attention to the hallway and followed the doors until I found my room at the end of the hallway labeled 401.

I opened the door while kicking off my shoes in the entranceway and gave my room a quick glance while I set the bag full of my toiletries on a nearby desk. For a moment I thought of going out and buying a laptop but set the idea aside to do another day.

Without taking off my clothes I dropped onto the top of my bed and let loose a heavy sigh.

I began to drift off to sleep while looking back on my eventful first day of school. I couldn't help but let a small smile grace my face at the events that transpired throughout the day.

'Maybe my peaceful school life might still be a reality after all.'

With that final thought I fell into the comfortable embrace of Morpheus.

A/N: I can't believe I actually got this out if I'm being honest with you guys. And it's my longest chapter so far like huh? Can you believe it?

Anyways I looked at the comments and it seems like I'm going to be going with more original content and while this may slow me down in the future I am having a blast writing at the moment.

Usually I struggle to write and find the motivation to write but seeing how much everyone enjoys my story is definitely a big motivation and I wouldn't be doing this without everyone's support so I appreciate it. While it's unfortunate I couldn't hit 100 votes and 1000 reads before this went up I'll just say thank you guys for it now since I will hit it when this goes up.

Anyways thank you for reading this author's note and my story and I hope everyone takes care.

Chapter 6

Reads: 3661 | Votes: 131 | Comments: 37

I opened my eyes to darkness and the comfortable cushion of the bed beneath me with my internal alarm clock saying that the time was 6:30. That still left me another hour to get ready and before I begin my trek to school.

I stared up at my bland ceiling for a few moments gathering the energy to get out of bed.

When I found the energy to move I lethargically peeled myself from the top of my bed and felt the last of Morphous' spell begin to wear off.

I walked over to the desk that was a few feet away from my bed and collected the plastic bag I put there last night. I grabbed the necessary toiletries and made my way to the bathroom to start my morning grooming.

Upon cleaning myself up I noticed a lack of hamper in my bathroom and began to feel a slight sense of dread. I then turned my gaze towards the closet that was in the bathroom and opened it with trepidation.

To my relief the closet held towels but there was still no sign of a hamper. With a sigh I listed the item on my mental grocery list the next time I went out.

I stripped down from my clothes and neatly folded them on the toilet seat before hopping in the shower looking to quickly clean myself.

I wasted little time in shower and quickly cleaned myself and hopped out of the shower with a small amount of steam covering the mirror and floating about the room.

I quickly dried myself off and exited the bathroom and made my way to the closet to grab a new uniform. I quickly donned the identical attire to what I wore yesterday.

'Glad they provide undergarments that would not be a fun experience having to wear the same ones from yesterday.'

Just like the first time I donned the uniform I buttoned up my undershirt to all but the buttons on the collar and then shrugged on my overcoat. I then sat down on my bed and pushed my legs into the slacks.

I was then faced with the herculean task of making it look like I didn't know how to tie a tie and make it look presentable. The disdain on my face at trying to get this boa constrictor under my control would've surely burned the tie in my grasp if I could produce the heat I was showing with my eyes.

I eventually got the tie to look somewhat presentable with a resigned sigh at knowing this was the best I was going to get at the moment.

'How is it that the one time I was ever sick was when we covered this?'

After glancing at the analog clock that was on one of the walls I noticed how long my battle with the demon really lasted and realized I used up more time than I wanted.

The clock read 7:30 and while I still had plenty of time to make it to class I would have rather left a little earlier so no unforeseen events could impede me on my way to school.

I swiftly sat up and grabbed my school bag and exited my room locked in a swift motion. I then made the long trek down the hallway and made it to the elevator and pressed the call button and waited for the slow descent of the elevator from one of the upper floors.

The elevator soon arrived on my floor and opened up with its usual 'ding' that heralded its stop. The doors pushed open and revealed

the carriage along with an additional rider inside.

"Horikita-san?"

When the elevator doors opened, I was greeted by none other than my brief companion at this school. I couldn't help but pause in the elevator's entranceway, struck by the fact that the only person I knew at school I bumped into on my way to class.

"Ayanokouji-kun, are you simply going to stand there and gawk, or should I presume your mental condition is in as poor condition as that tie around your neck?"

"You know you can be rather hurtful with your words. I didn't even do anything to warrant such blatant antagonization."

After my words I walked into the elevator and stood side by side with Horikita with the elevator doors soon closing afterwards.

"Have you forgotten about your perversions against me yesterday already? How terrible for you to run me a foul and act like it never transpired."

"I believe we had decided to start over and forget what had happened. It's not reasonable that you continuously mention your ridiculous assumptions about me."

"But is it not true that I have proof? Or are you going to try to convince me that your unwavering gaze wasn't on purpose?"

"Would you believe me if I told you I'm prone to spacing out?"

I tried to fight back against Horikita's persistent taunts, but was faced with a fast reaction that completely cut my words down.

"No."

"You're very cruel."

Horikita let out a sigh in response to my accusation and walked in front of me, bringing us face to face.

"You do realize I'm not some heartless monster right?"

After letting out words I couldn't help but look at with skepticism she then did something unexpected. She stuck out both of her hands and went to work with properly straightening my tie for me.

"I hope you know that you owe me for this and that I won't be doing this for you every day like I'm your mother."

I couldn't help but raise an eyebrow at her words before responding.

"Why should I be indebted when I didn't ask for you to fix my tie and that you did it of your own volition."

"Because I won't accept my seatmate looking like a slob. Your disgusting appearance will affect me since we're seat partners and will only serve to paint me in a bad light for not correcting you."

With that she finished and stepped away and admired her handiwork for a second before returning to my side.

"Thank you for your help Horikita-san, even if there was a very roundabout way of describing why you did something nice."

"Do you want me to yank that tie off your neck?"

"No ma'am."

"That's what I thought."

The elevator's signature 'ding' soon signaled that it was time for us to depart the elevator and we began to make our way to class.

Upon arriving we began to partake in classes for the first time since arriving at the school. The classes were not difficult for me however what was curious was that despite students talking, being on their phones, and even sleeping in class. Despite this no one in class was reprimanded for their actions.

I thought that maybe Sae-sensei was just being lenient but when the other teachers came in to teach their subjects they treated us with

the same level of disinterest as Sae-sensei to the other students' blatant disrespect.

While the chaos seemed to swell and swell as the day went out my eyes couldn't help but be drawn to the security cameras in the back two corners of the room.

~Break~

"It's rather unusual isn't it? I've never experienced such leniency before from teachers."

My seatmate seemed to share my sentiment as I looked around the class to see the previous unruly nature of the class amplified due to us being dismissed for lunch a few moments prior.

I briefly looked over to Horikita who was delicately taking out two bentos from her school bag. After setting the first one on her desk she took out the second one and gave me a side eye while holding onto the bento.

"Do you expect me to stand up and walk over and give this to you?"

"Well can you blame me? Since you're presenting me with a gift it's usually common courtesy to give your gift to the recipient. But you can hold onto it for now I need to use the bathroom. I'll come back and grab it, is that satisfactory?"

"If you're fine with eating cold Kagaare then who am I to stop you. However I hope this doesn't become a recurring tactic of yours to try and avoid me."

"I'm glad to know my company means so much to you that you are already looking to keep me around for when I would make up an excuse."

"So you're admitting to the fact that you are avoiding me right now and will do so in the future Ayanokouji-kun?"

I could feel her cold stare pierce through me with an underlying layer of danger to her voice which made me break out into a small sweat."

"I never said anything about avoiding you. I really do need to use the bathroom right now."

"Then what about making up excuses in the future to avoid me?"

"I plead the fifth."

"That's only in the United States."

"My point stands."

To prevent myself from digging a larger hole for myself I quickly excused myself and made my way to the bathroom.

I was able to make it to the restroom and complete my business unperturbed. My return to the classroom, on the other hand, was a different story.

"Excuse me, you're Ayanokouji-kun aren't you?"

On my way back to the classroom I was suddenly stopped by the girl who was helping the older lady on the bus yesterday and introduced herself as Kushida to the class.

Since this was the first time I got a proper close look at her I couldn't help but take note of her beauty. She was definitely a looker that would easily have boys and girls alike fawn over her.

Despite this I couldn't help but compare her to Horikita and find her lacking. Same could be said for most females however so it's not that outrageous of a statement.

Also for reasons I can't comprehend, my heart sped up for a second when she began talking to me which I would expect after being addressed by such a beautiful girl. Oddly enough my heart rate quickly returned to normal like it never happened and even stranger it felt as if her previous beauty lost some of its radiance.

I couldn't explain this phenomenon so I decided to take note and think about it later.

"I'm Kushida, from your class. Do you remember me?" she asked.

"Yeah, kinda. Do you need something?"

"To tell you the truth there's something I wanted to ask you. It's just one little question. Ayanokouji-kun, are you on good terms with Horikita-san?"

"I wouldn't call it that, we act...amicable? To one another so I wouldn't say we were on good terms. If she heard me say that she would probably shower me with insults."

Unperturbed by my uncertainty, Kushida pressed on without missing a beat after my response.

"Oh, I see. Weren't you two getting along on the first day of school though? You two walked out of class together and I heard that you two were seen together yesterday evening."

'How did she know about that? I didn't spot anyone from our class at all during our little excursion yesterday.'

Oblivious to the current questioning brewing inside of me Kushida continued talking and revealed her objective to approaching me.

"I wish to make friends with everyone in our year and to do that I need to get everyone's contact information. So I was hoping I could get yours and if you knew Horikita-sans. After you left the classroom earlier I asked her for her contact info and she shut me down.

Kushida just laid bare to me her earnest goal to make friends and I couldn't help but respect and admire her goal seeing as I had a similar but much loftier goal of making a few friends.

The radiant smile she had during the entire conversation was almost enough to make me believe for a moment that she had pure intentions and that she wanted to be genuine friends from the bottom of her heart.

Once more I couldn't help but feel this weariness from when I first spotted her and now the sensation was going haywire.

"Ah, sorry I don't have my phone on me. I left it in my dorm room earlier so can you give me your contact information and I'll add

your contact information to mine when I retrieve it. And I'm sorry but I don't have Horikita-san's contact information myself. Despite the fact that you think she acts amicable towards me she treats me with just as much coldness as she did you earlier."

"Oh, it's fine Ayanokouji-kun I'll quickly write down my contact information and I guess I'll just give it a try another day to try and befriend Horikita-san."

'That's probably a lost cause even for someone as bubbly and nice as you. If anything it will actively harm you in trying to make friends with Horikita.'

Kushida then reached into her school bag that she had at her side and pulled out a notebook and flipped to the last page and scribbled her email at the bottom and then ripped out a small piece of paper before handing it to me.

'Despite this being the first girl's contact information I've gotten I can't help but feel neutral to the fact. No excitement or racing of the heart that happened earlier. Just indifference to the fact.'

After handing me the paper Kushida gave me a bow and a rushed farewell as she explained she was meeting up with friends and rushed off into the direction of the cafeteria.

Finally after clearing the roadblock that I ran into I finally made it back to the classroom. Said classroom was now sparsely populated with only a few students hanging around with a majority of them sitting alone except for a pair of a boy and girl.

The boy had short slicked gray hair with a pair of glasses framing his face with a scowl that wouldn't look out of place on my seatmate. The girl meanwhile had long flowing blue hair that resembled the ocean in which the eloquence in which her hair streamed around her.

However my attention was soon directed towards my seatmate who was sitting at her desk with both bento unopened and a new book in her hand titled, 'Don Quixote'.

'Another foreign book she got translated. Where does she keep finding these? The first one was a personal one since she was reading it on the bus but I wonder if this one is in our school library.'

Adding another to-do on my ever growing list I softly approached Horikita and settled in to the left of her desk. It took a few moments before Horikita looked up at me, noticing my presence early and was waiting to find a stopping point in her book.

"Took you long enough, I half expected you to have flushed yourself down the toilet by accident. Wouldn't be out of character for the main character of this novel I'm reading which distinctly reminds me of you."

"It's a bit cruel of you to compare me to someone like that. We both know I'd never be as arrogant or brazen as he is. I'd rather stay inside than embark on some grand adventure of glory."

"Hm, I suppose you're correct I can see you being his idiotic twin but you would at least have the common sense to not follow him to an early grave."

A tiny smirk played on her lips after her assertion and I couldn't help but feel my heart warm a bit at seeing Horikita enjoy herself with our usual banter.

Without any further words she grabbed the bento and thrust it into my arms without giving me a second glance. After I was able to secure the bento without fear of dropping it Horikita then began to untie and unbox her bento.

I soon sat down and began to do the same unboxing the bento with anticipation building within me while eating a home cooked meal.

As I finished unboxing the bento I looked over at Horikita who now had a thermos adorning her desk along with her lunch and gave her a thanks.

"Thank you for the meal Horikita-san."

"... "

Knowing I was not going to get a response I took up the chopsticks that were included with my bento and began to dig into my bento not before muttering a quick, "Itadakimasu."

I grabbed a piece of karaage with a tiny scoop of rice and sliced cabbage and took my first bite.

"Delicious"

I couldn't help but let out my honest opinion after taking my first bite as the food was some of the most flavorful I've ever had.

"Is that so? I'm glad to know my efforts didn't go to waste."

I looked over at Horikita and gave her a quick nod of appreciation before returning to the food.

After two more bites something unexpected happened as Horikita spoke out to me once again.

"Would you care for some tea? It's Jasmine."

I looked over and saw Horikita offering the top of her thermos as a cup and had her hand held out for me to take the offered tea.

"I can't reach."

"Did you not learn from earlier? Do you expect me to stand up for you?"

With a resigned sigh I stood up and grabbed the tea before returning to my seat and finishing the tea off after another couple of bites.

"Would you like some more?"

"Not if I have to get up again to do it."

"Then it seems as if you're at an impasse."

I glanced over at Horikita before a plan formed into my head and then proceeded to put it into action.

'Hopefully this doesn't end in me having to meet the end of her compass again.'

I calmly stood up and evenly saddled my desk up next to hers in order to give easy reach to her offered tea.

"..."

Horikita only stared at my actions and didn't respond with the only sign of acknowledgement being the slight tinting of her ears at their tips and the soft shuffling of her hands fiddling with her skirt.

We both continued eating in silence with me occasionally getting a refill from Horikita with no difficulty.

"Hey."

"Hm, what is it?"

"You're close."

"Would you prefer it if I moved back?"

"I didn't say it was a problem just warning you that any closer and you will once again be labeled a pervert."

"Quite a harsh punishment for wanting to share lunch with a friend."

"You could have easily done so without moving your desk. And I don't know where you got the notion from that we are friends but you are mistaken."

"Isn't this what friends do? Eat lunch together? I mean you even made my lunch for me."

"It was simply an act of gratitude after you accompanied me yesterday and I would like you to refrain from thinking otherwise."

"Didn't you force me to come shopping with you yesterday? So going by your logic, you shouldn't have any reason to pay me back since I was indebted to you, so you had no reason to repay me with

a favor.

"It's quite remarkable that you will go to such an extent of mental gymnastics in order to gain a friend. I truly pity you Ayanokouji-kun. Almost enough to actually befriend you out of pity, but if I did that I wouldn't forgive myself for getting close to someone such as yourself."

Deciding that I poked the bear enough today without getting my arm bit off and was only subject to a series of growls I went back to eating my bento to which Horikita swiftly did the same after realizing I wasn't going to respond.

Soon both of us finished our meals and despite our earlier verbal spar I couldn't help but compliment her once more on her cooking and ask for a request after a few moments of deliberation.

"Thank you for the meal Horikita-san. ...Also are you going to make lunch again tomorrow?"

"I don't want to."

With my request swiftly crushed I began moving my desk back to its original spot with slight dejection in my gaze.

"However it doesn't mean I won't make more; however it depends on whether or not you will continue to pay for the ingredients."

"This time can I pay for my own share of the ingredients because paying for two people will quickly get out of hand and bankrupt me before I know it."

"Are you telling me that you are so irresponsible that you will lose all your money just from food expenses? Might you need help with budgeting? I could help you but I'd rather see you struggle and flop around like a fish out of water trying to see you budget yourself."

"Have I told you that you can be quite cruel at times."

"You haven't. But it doesn't matter since your claims are made off of baseless accusations with no evidence."

The bell then rang signaling the end of lunch and the resumption of classes in 15 minutes.

"I suppose I will need to gather my evidence and bring it to court another day since court was just adjourned. Your cruelty will be brought to justice in the near future."

"What was the point of that little spiel just now?"

"A joke."

"A rather poor one."

Despite her words a small smile broke out at the corner of Horikitas lips. I decided not to comment on it and proceeded to commit the sight to memory.

A/N: Hope I didn't worry you guys there about not posting. First time so far without a consecutive upload but don't worry I'm still going strong and with a new longest chapter. How about that?

Also I went back and read some of my earlier chapters in their entirety for the first time and man are there some writing errors that bother me. I haven't taken the time to go back since I'm more focused on writing chapters but boy does it bother me. Because of this I'm contemplating getting a beta to proofread before I post my chapters from now on.

Feel free to message me if anyone is interested in the idea. I

don't know if I will go through with it but I'm the type of person that usually has fanfiction enjoyment drop when there's multiple grammar errors. Every now and then is fine but the fact I had multiple just makes it worse since I try and hold myself to a higher standard of having really good grammar and spelling.

Anyways the writer thought vomit is over. I hope you guys enjoyed this chapter and once again thank you for all the amazing support and I hope everyone takes care.

Chapter 7

Reads: 3335 | Votes: 128 | Comments: 36

After lunch class continued in the same chaos that was prevalent before lunch with the same disregard being shown by the teachers.

When classes ended for the day an announcement from the speakers rang out alongside the bell that signaled the end of classes.

"Today, at 5pm in gymnasium number 1, there will be a club fair. For those of you with an interest in clubs, please come to gymnasium number 1. I repeat, today—"

A girl with a cute voice made an announcement over the PA.

'Clubs, huh. I wonder what kind of clubs they have to offer here. They must have a large variety of clubs here at school. But that also brings up another question, with how much money we get monthly that means they also have to balance the budget of dozens of clubs. If I expect the same level of wealth to be thrown at these clubs then there must be dozens of them.'

With my interest in the situation peaked I looked over at my seatmate who was gathering her stuff in her bag to leave and I addressed her with the intention of accompanying me.

"Hey Horikita—"

"I have no interest in joining any clubs. Besides, you need to accompany me to the convenience store in order to buy some more ingredients."

"...You didn't even let me explain what I wanted to do."

"Ok, then enlighten me, after an announcement played that talked about there being a club fair today and you asked me moments after the fact what were you planning on asking me about? And if

it's about going to examine the clubs, don't answer."

"Do you want to accompany me to the club fair in the gymnasium?"

"Are you trying to antagonize me? Or are you suffering mentally from some brain damage that leaves gaps in your memory."

"I'm perfectly put together and have all my mental facilities. Thank you for caring about my well being. But I want someone to go with to view the club fair because I'm interested in what they have to offer and how they're going to pitch their clubs."

"Do you have any actual interest in joining a club or are you using this as an excuse to try and make friends."

"While it's rather mean spirited that you poke at my lack of friends I was curious in how the clubs held themselves. Especially to new members as there might be some kind of point incentive to clubs that have members. Because despite us getting a monthly allowance, clubs would also need a budget from the school to stay operational."

"Hm, you do have a point but I don't see why I need to accompany you to this fair."

"It's because you're the only person I can invite since you're the only person I am cordial with in the class."

"I suppose you're right. I'm the only option you can turn to in this situation. I accept only on the condition that you pay for the ingredients for lunch tomorrow."

"I don't know how to feel about once again offering my Wallet-chan up to you for sacrifice but I rather enjoyed your lunch today and I would appreciate the company."

"Learn this as a lesson for later than Ayanokouji-kun. Friendship is all about getting something out of the other person and paying them back with whatever they can get out of you."

"So you admit to doing things with me that friends will do and even giving my advice about friendship yet you still fervently deny

wanting to be friends with me. I believe rather than you not wanting to make any friends you're simply afraid of opening up to someone."

"Oh, and that someone should be you? The person who talks and acts like a brick wall but is actually a carpet that lets others walk all over them. I'm sure I'll come to regret not making friends with you but with a heavy heart I will have to decline your offer."

"That was rather sassy of you Horikita-san I haven't seen that from you before. Are these signs of the walls around your heart slowly crumbling down?"

"Do you want to keep your tongue inside of your mouth? If so, I suggest a postponement of your current line of thinking."

"I guess not. Seems like I got my hopes up for nothing."

"You're being rather cheeky for someone who's asking me to accompany them because they have no friends. I don't see how your actions are meant to convince me."

"Let's just walk around and view every club once then I can take you out and get you those ingredients. Then as an apology we can get shaved ice or ice cream. How does that sound?"

"You've become so desperate that you've had to resort to bribes? I'd mock your actions, but it appears that I won't be able to do so because I agree to your terms. But that doesn't mean I won't ridicule you for your predicament."

With a sigh I sat up with having to resort to such lengths to convince Horikita. Once I sat up I packed all my things together into my bag and walked up to Horikita who was waiting beside my desk.

We soon exited the classroom and began to maneuver through throngs of people who were also making their way to the gymnasium.

~Break~

As we made it to the entrance of the gymnasium almost everyone present were first years with around 100 students waiting for the club fair to start.

As we entered the gym, pamphlets with details about club activities were passed out along with the shouts of club members trying to attract members.

"We have tryouts on Friday, and there are only five open spots for first-year students, so sign up now!"

"Come sign up quickly because we only have three flutes available for first-years!"

Similar yells detailing enrollment scarcity with an urgent timbre colored most club members voices in a bid to get people to join their clubs.

"It seems you might not have been far off with the idea that clubs are given points based on how many members they have. Or maybe it's that each club needs a certain number of members to maintain a club and it's larger than the atypical three in other schools."

"It would explain why every club seems urgent to grab members ranging from the Soccer club to the Literature club."

After my assertion and seemingly contemplating my earlier words, Horikita asked me an interesting question.

"You seem rather capable despite how you act and carry yourself Ayanokouji-kun. Not everyone would come to the conclusion that clubs would get bonuses on how many members they have."

"It was just an easy inference, many businesses nowadays give bonuses to their employees if they get customers to sign up to whatever membership program the company has. It's rather common practice so it makes sense that the school would prepare us for such an occasion."

"I suppose you're right but that doesn't discount the fact that your conclusion is a rather abnormal development to consider. I doubt many others would come to that conclusion, chiefly those in our

classroom from what I've seen of them so far."

"What are your impressions of our classmates?" I'm curious as to what you think of our classmates, especially since you don't have the intention to make friends."

"I see all of them as inferior with maybe one or two that could rival me in academics. Other than that I have given them no further mind."

"So you just view them in terms of how successful they are academically?"

"Of course, how else would I view them? One's strength as this school is based on how well you score in your classes."

"Wouldn't physical education factor into that too? What about then?"

"I am confident in scoring above average in physical assignments. And I'm sure that will be more than enough to beat most of the other girls in our class."

"Rather confident in your skills aren't you?"

"It's because I always scored at the very top and I continue to improve myself to do even better so I don't see how or why that would stop now."

"Then why don't you try to use your superb skills towards clubs then you could probably earn an incentive like extra points."

"Well how about you Ayanokouji-kun? You must also have a skill since you're so invested in school clubs. Is there any activity you excel at? Or are you so mundane and incompetent person that you have no skill that could help you in any of these clubs."

"I don't but I could still enjoy a club because I enjoy the activity."

"And which one would that be?"

"I enjoy playing piano and I've dabbled in archery. But these clubs

look extremely high-level so even if I did join I doubt I would see any actual competition participation."

"That does seem rather like you wanting to join a club but not being bothered enough to put in the effort to train and excel."

"Can't I enjoy my hobbies without having to compete in them? Plenty of people play instruments and don't compete in contests so what's the difference here?"

"Being able to improve yourself and do so in an environment filled with like minded individuals where you will learn tricks of the trade from others or get coached by those who are of a higher skill level than you."

"I suppose but I'd rather learn and grow at my own pace when I'm learning a hobby. I don't want to ruin the enjoyment by pushing myself too hard."

"I wonder how you're going to make friends with that attitude. You're lucky that I pity you enough to accompany me."

"But didn't I invite you out for this?"

"It's only because you incentivized me to go." I wouldn't be here right now if it weren't for you. Is this Ayanokouji-kun's plan for forming friendships? If that's the case, I can see how some students squander their monthly stipend. If they're as desperate to make friends as you are, money will be no barrier to their goals."

"I wish you would shower me with compliments instead of insults."

"How about you work towards obtaining a redeeming quality that's worth praising."

We began walking around the various booths, and we both noticed the cutting-edge equipment being advertised for every club, from oxygen capsules to music equipment valued at tens of thousands of yen,

"I think your idea that clubs gain extra points based on participants is false seeing as most clubs have access to the same equipment as

the others. But that begs the question why are they so insistent on gathering as many members as possible?"

"It makes sense thinking about it with hindsight. It wouldn't be very fair to the other clubs since soccer would inherently obtain more members than the basketball club. As for gathering so many members I have no idea."

Our conversation was soon stopped as a cute female student walked up to the podium and tapped on the mic before speaking into it, gathering the attention of the entire gymnasium.

"Thank you for waiting, first year students. A representative from each club will explain their activities and how to join. I am Tachibana, the secretary of the student council and the chairman responsible for this club fair. Nice to meet you."

I was able to recognize her voice as the same one that was talking over the intercom earlier.

"And now I'd like to introduce the president of the student council, who will speak briefly. After his words you may then return to participating in the club fair."

A familiar student began to walk towards the stage and towards the podium.

I looked over towards Horikita remembering the connection of names and saw Horikita's gaze fixated on the new arrival with anxiety coloring her eyes.

If I had any doubts remaining they were definitely squashed now as this is the second time now Horikita has been fixated on the student council president.

Once more Horikita seemed so small and vulnerable, completely unlike the headstrong girl I've come to know.

I turned my attention back to the student council president and instead of giving a speech like it was mentioned he instead stood at the head of the podium in silence.

I couldn't get a read on his expression and couldn't hazard a guess as to what his thoughts could be. He had such a guarded expression it nearly rivaled mine. We've both had a lifetime to master such a skill but mine was born from necessity and his was from practice.

Not soon after the crowd began to heckle the elder Horikita.

"Do your best~"

"Did you forget to bring your notecards~?"

"Ahahaha!"

The first years threw merciless jabs and jeers at the seemingly reclusive and soft spoken student council president.

However their insults and laughter soon teetered out as the elder Horikita stayed as apathetic as ever in the face of the situation.

He continued to stand there in silence with his eyes sweeping over the gymnasium building the tension and having an uncomfortable wave wash over the first-years.

I once more looked at Suzune and saw her frozen in place with her hand trying to grasp at her skirt but was unable to move into said position to give Suzune her small solace of comfort.

At seeing Suzune in such a pitiful sight, I felt a strange tug in my heart and an urge to help her. As I thought of a way to comfort her I couldn't help but stop and contemplate what I was doing.

'Why do I want to help her? She has been nothing but rude to me since we met yet I feel compelled to help. She doesn't even acknowledge us as friends and even said she sees them as a system of equivalent exchange of goods or services. Yet why am I so insistent on helping her right now?'

My mind sped by a mile a minute trying to come up with the solution to my current conundrum but was soon halted by the worsening state of Horikita.

She began to break out in a small sweat with her hands beginning

to shake in anxiety and whatever previous reservations I had were swiftly stomped down.

I reached my hand out and softly enveloped her hand in mine and gave her hand a gentle squeeze of support. Horikita's previous shaking began to seize up and she turned a slow wide-eyed gaze towards me in shock.

"Are you alright Suzune?"

I whispered my concerns in a soft voice that showed a tiny hint of emotion in my voice which could be classified as concern if one could pinpoint the very minute change in my voice.

Suzune jerked her head up with wide eyes after hearing my words. She tugged her head down, brought her other hand up to her chest, and cupped her hand in front of her in anxiety.

She stayed like that for a brief moment before looking into my eyes with a noticeable blush on her face and opened her mouth to speak.

"Ayanokou—"

"My name is Horikita Manabu, and I am the student council president. However I would hope this should be no surprise as you would already know this if you were paying attention during the entrance ceremony."

After Manabu's words, Suzune's head snapped to the ground and she began to meekly draw in on herself, shuffle her feet, and ever so slightly increase the pressure of her hand against mine.

I decided to leave any words of comfort until after Manabu's speech and slightly began to rub my thumb against the back of her hand in what comfort I could give in this situation.

The soft but powerful voice of Manabu continued on with him giving no indication of his relative's condition as he continued his speech without pause.

"The student council is also looking for first-years to replace the graduating third-years. There are no strict requirements to apply for

the position, but those who are interested should not be affiliated with any other clubs. Generally, we do not accept any candidate involved in other clubs."

I once more looked at Horikita to see if she had any reaction to Manabu's words but she stayed the same as before. However I could have sworn as if I saw a glint in her eye that was not there before.

"Also, we, the student council, are not looking for anyone that has a naïve way of thinking. Not only will that kind of person fail to get elected, they will inevitably become a stain to this school. The student council is only responsible for regulating the students, but the school expects much more. Those of you that understand can become potential candidates."

With that Manabu finished his speech and pushed himself off the podium and then walked off the stage before exiting the building entirely.

The tense atmosphere of the gym continued with not a soul in the gymnasium brave enough to talk and break the silence.

It seems the title of student council president isn't just for show. With only a stare and an unwavering speech did he shut down not only the first-years but the second and third-year students who were meant to be ambassadors of their clubs.

"What a perilous guy he is. If he can handle a crowd like that, I'm curious how he manages his classroom."

"Everyone, thank you for coming. With that, the club fair is over. We will now open the reception area for anyone interested in joining. The reception area will only be open until the end of April, so anyone interested after then can bring applications directly to the club."

With the help of the chairman, the tense atmosphere slowly disappeared.

Afterwards, the chaos ensued once more with the club representatives once more began to promote their clubs while

interested students began to ask questions or talk with their friends.

I looked towards Horikita who was still frozen in place beside me.

"Are you okay?"

No response came as my words seemingly didn't reach her so I tried again.

"Can you make it back to the dorms?"

This time I accompanied my question with a slight squeeze of her hand which seemed to knock her out of the trance she was in.

She looked at me and opened her mouth to respond before shutting it. Despite her relative no longer being here it seemed to leave a profound effect on her.

Horikita then took a few steps to put some space in between us and gently removed her hand from mine.

"I'm going back to the dorms. I'm sorry but I won't be able to make you lunch tomorrow."

Horikita began to set off towards the exit and as I was about to take a step to follow when she was about two arm lengths away she turned around and stopped me in my tracks with her words.

"Have a good afternoon Ayanokouji-kun and please don't follow me."

With that she began walking once more and I couldn't help but see her leave as her back began to gather more and more distance between the two of us. I tried to keep my eyes on her but I lost her in the crowd before she made it to the exit.

I sat there dumbfounded at the situation before I was suddenly attacked by a brick wall that knocked me over. As I looked up I spotted the student who ran into me that was trying his best to be built like a brick wall.

And the student who was muttering curses under his breath was

none other than Sudo Ken, the loud antagonistic redhead from my class. Alongside him were Ike and Yamauchi.

"Hey watch where you're going man."

"Ah, sorry I was just lost in thought and didn't know where I was going."

"Don't you think that was your fault though Sudo? You were looking at us while you were talking."

"It's not my fault that he blends into the background now is it? Like seriously how else would I bump into him since we're almost the same height"

Despite the harsh words being thrown at me I couldn't help but look at this situation as a prime way to try and make friends with my classmates.

"Hey, you're in class D right? I'm also in your class. What clubs are you guys considering joining?"

I began to finally pick myself up off the floor and began to dust myself off. Sudo stopped and eyed me for a second before providing me with an answer.

"I'm going to join the basketball club since I plan on going pro."

"How long have you been playing? You seem like you've been playing for a long time?"

In an instant after my question Sudo's face brightened considerably as he found someone who was interested in talking about a passion of his.

"I've been playing basketball since elementary school. And I'm looking to continue playing here. What about you?"

"I was just looking around to see if there was a club that would catch my fancy but so far no luck."

I eyed the other two and raised an eyebrow and posed them the

same question.

"What about you two? What clubs are you looking to join?"

"We just came because it seemed fun and exciting. I also hoped some kind of fateful encounter would happen."

I couldn't help but raise my questioning eyebrow even further at the questionable goal he's setting for himself.

"What kind of encounter are we talking about here?"

"Finding a girlfriend of course! I was looking to bump into a girl here who seemed lost or was looking at a club that I could be good at and then have us hit it off from there."

Ike spoke passionately about his goal which only served to make me feel a slight offset because of his enthusiasm. However I continued to listen and pay attention to his spiel. Besides who am I to judge if gaining a significant other was an essential part of someone's ideal school life.

"In addition, the student council president has a powerful air. As though he was in charge of the area."

"Right? He was able to keep everyone quiet." "Sure, sure. I also started a male group chat yesterday."

Ike pulled out his phone.

"Do you want to join us as well? It's rather convenient."

"Is it all right?"

"Without a doubt. After all, we're all in class D."

That surprised me. I'm delighted I was invited to a group chat. A fantastic opportunity to make new friends has arrived!

However at the thought of making new friends I couldn't help but hesitate as my thoughts turned towards Horikita who left in a less than ideal state earlier.

"Hey, is something wrong? Why'd you freeze up all of a sudden"

"Sorry it's nothing, I was just trying to remember my number."

After regaining my composure, I exchanged my contact information with the others.

Soon the others began to tour the club fair once more. I followed them and lightly chimed in on any conversation that I could contribute to. However, the entirety of the time with my new acquaintances my mind couldn't help but turn towards Horikita and her sudden exit.

'I hope she's holding up okay. Next time I see her I should ask for her contact information so I can check up on her. I don't like not knowing how she's holding up especially after the scene she had earlier.'

A/N: So yeah this chapter was meant to come out yesterday. However some things came up that put me in a bad mood so I decided not to write while stressed so the quality of the chapter wouldn't dip. And once again a new record for longest chapter so that's nice.

Also if you want an estimate how long I will take to release a chapter skip to the last paragraph of this Author's Note

If you want to listen to me complain about what happened then I will soon explain but if not then thank you for reading this chapter and again thank you everyone for the support! I'm

going to hit 2k reads and 200 votes after this goes up and I can't thank you guys enough. I know I said this before but your guy's support is the lifeblood of this fic and it means a lot to me.

Anyways if you're still reading then thank you. Anyways I'm dumb and took my car out the other day to get it done as a problem came up. I took it to a car repair shop at 8am as I set up an appointment. When I got there they said I'm gonna have to wait 1 ½ hours until they even touch my car.

I'm like wtf I set up an appointment but I didn't say anything and I waited there since I had no ride. When they finally got to my car they said my car had a fuel leak and needed to move a part and doing so would be \$250 in labor. This is already on top of the \$60 fee to have my car be inspected in the first place.

I say they can do it and they come back 30 minutes later and they need to order parts out of state since no one has the part they need. They showed me the price and the price of the part is \$800 LIKE HUH. That doesn't even include the \$600 labor fee that they would need to install it.

Anyways I basically say screw it. I can't fix it and I was planning on selling my car already so I'll just let whoever I sell it to deal with it.

So I basically spent \$350 for someone to tell me my car is broken and that I can't do anything about it :).

Also that same day I was reading an article about COTE and it had a LN illustration spoiler on the front page of the article so I got spoiled. So that made my day even better. Thankfully I've calmed down today and was able to get this chapter out.

TLDR I got screwed at a car repair shop and got spoiled on COTE.

Anyways sorry for ranting about my life this time. I'll try not to do this again. I just wanted to get it out there and give a reason

as to why this chapter came out a day later than it's supposed to.

Anyways thank you everyone for your support and from now on I will try and get a chapter out every 3-4 days and if I get one out sooner then it's either a treat or I'm saving it to release a mega chapter. If there is a delay for any reason including laziness I will post an update on my profile's conversations. Once again thank you for reading this chapter and this AN even if partially and I hope everyone has a good one.

Chapter 8

Reads: 2967 | Votes: 117 | Comments: 18

After walking through the rest club fair with Sudo, Ike, and Yamauchi I decided to go out and do some shopping for myself due to having my prior arrangements suddenly canceled.

The trio I was with earlier seemed to have plans after the club fair and I wanted to join them but couldn't find the courage to impose on them and asked to be invited.

I traveled to Keyaki Mall and went into the first electronic store I found with the intent of making my first big expense. I was able to find a cheap laptop for 6500 yen. I saw other laptops that were in the high five figures but decided to go with the cheapest one I saw.

This may be a large expense but it will serve me well with another source of internet access and being able to easily complete writing assignments or any electronic assignments or projects.

As I was getting my purchase finalized by the cashier he began making some small talk with me.

"I'm surprised to see someone buy one of the cheaper models we have available. Yesterday right after class ended I rang up a first-year student who bought one of our most expensive ones that cost 80000 yen."

My eyes bulged at the information that someone went through most of their monthly stipend the very first day. However what caught my interest was the way the cashier relayed that information as if it wasn't that big of a deal.

"Do you usually have students come in and use up that many points in one purchase?"

"Not really, I've seen it happen, it just happens very rarely."

"Well it is a lot of points to spend so I doubt many would be willing to spend that many points especially when we get later in the year."

"After working here for the past few years you tend to see the impossible, so it becomes less shocking when you do see it."

"I suppose you're right."

With that our conversation soon came to an end and I exited the electronic shop and began walking to the library which was in the direction of the school dorms.

As I exited Keyaki Mall I spotted a couple of my female classmates shopping together in one of the stores I passed by. Leading the group in their little shopping spree was a blonde haired girl that had her hair up in a ponytail being held together by a cyan scrunchie.

I gave them a quick glance before continuing on to my destination of the school library.

~Break~

I arrived at the library thankfully uninterrupted with my new purchase secured inside my school bag which gave it a small increase in its weight.

When I pushed open the library dozens of shelves were revealed before me with multiple floors filled to the brim with bookshelves. The amount of books located in this library easily numbered in the couple thousands, maybe even tens of thousands. The selection in front of me easily marked this as a grand library in its scale.

I couldn't help but gawk in the entranceway at the scale and feel a giddiness begin to rise within me at the sight. That reminds me of the translated book I saw Horikita reading the past two days I saw her.

As she was reading the first one on the bus, she couldn't have obtained either of those at this library. She couldn't have acquired the one from earlier today, attributed to the fact that I spent the first day with her. As a result, she couldn't have gotten her hands on

the book, as I had assumed, because the library was closed by the time we returned to the dormitory, so she couldn't have gone out late to get the book.

'Despite her not obtaining either of her books from the library I wouldn't be surprised if they carried the same books also translated. And if they somehow didn't carry a certain book I'm sure the school would acquire them for us for a fee.'

After getting my emotions under control I began to wander the nearby bookshelves after giving the receptionist a polite nod as I passed by.

As I walked the isles I noticed that they had a wide variety of novels from multiple countries from Japan's own 'Woman on the Other Shore' to the famous American novel 'To Kill a Mockingbird.' There was even Ghanaian novel titled 'Changes.'

'I wonder if there are any novels they would exclude from the library? For example, would they have manifestos in here such as 'Mein Kampf?' They've shown that they are willing to carry controversial books if 'To Kill a Mockingbird.' is on the shelves. If there is a line I wonder what it is.'

However, I ran into a fellow student before I could go seek for my answer. She was small in comparison to me, finishing up at my chest, with mid-back length silver hair knotted behind her with black ribbons. She also had brilliant purple eyes that shone brightly.

"Oh, I'm sorry I wasn't watching where I was going and bumped into you. I'm sorry for not paying attention to my surroundings but I was looking for a specific book and can't seem to find it."

The girl in front of me spoke with a soft tone that took me straining my ears to properly hear her. Despite us being in a library I can't help but feel as if her regular speaking voice was only one or two decibels louder

"It's no problem I was lost in thought too so I'm just as much to blame. What book are you looking for? Maybe I spotted it earlier and I can show it to you,

A brilliant smile broke out on her face at my words and I could see her somehow brilliant eyes shine even brighter than they did before.

'I hope I did see the book beforehand because I don't think I could take the dejection that would cover her face If I got her hopes up for nothing.'

"The book is called 'Journey to the West', when I looked in the book database on one of the computers in the library I saw that they have a woodblock version! Can you believe it?! A woodblock version! I have to get my hands on it!

"Ah, sorry I didn't see it earlier when I was looking around."

The girl's face in front of me immediately drooped giving her the look of a kicked puppy which left a giant hole in my heart at the sight.

'You're the absolute scum and bottom of the earth Ayanokouji. Look at what you did, this is all your fault.'

My inner thoughts quickly berated me at what I caused and immediately spoke out to try and rectify the situation.

"I can help you look for it! Don't worry, I'm sure we'll locate it in no time with the two of us searching for it. I honestly hope there's another copy available since I'd like to get my hands on it as well.

At my words her face lit up with a radiance that would have put the sun to shame.

"I would appreciate your help! Thankfully they have two in stock when I checked so we can both have a copy.

Somehow her smile seemed to broaden even further at the thought of the two of us reading the same book together. I couldn't help but feel the effects of her energetic attitude and get swept up in the moment with her and soon the both of us began fervently looking for the book.

Our search began and stretched on with both of us searching for

this elusive novel. We continued searching with there seemingly being no hope in sight before a very quiet sound of excitement came from my companion further down the aisle.

"I found it!"

Her quiet shout of excitement barely carried the aisle we were in together yet it sounded like the bell that regularly rang out during the school and I quickly made my way down the aisle towards my companion.

As I saddled up to my companion she was excitedly flipping through the pages and despite my companion telling me it was a woodblock print I couldn't contain my surprise at the fact the pages were actually made out of cloth.

"I can't believe I actually found it! This is such an amazing piece and this artwork looks suburb! They must've created or commissioned this themselves. None of the pages are faded and the leather cover is in stunning condition."

As my companion continued to flip through the novel I looked to where she grabbed the book and saw three other leather bound novels and picked up the next one in line.

My eyebrows quickly furrowed as I skimmed through the first few pages with a small sense of dread creeping up my spine. I then put the book back and picked up the next novel in line with my fears being confirmed.

"It seems the other copies of the book are different volumes and not copies. So that means I won't be able to read it unless I want to read out of order."

Dejection began to fill me as I wouldn't be able to get my hands on the novel until my latest companion finished reading the novel.

After my words my companion looked at me with eyes filled with sadness as she came to the same conclusion that she wouldn't be able to share the experience with me.

"Ah, you're right. It's rather unfortunate that we won't be able to

experience reading the novel together. Despite me knowing some of the plot points it would've been fun to talk about the chapters together as we read through it."

She looked down in sadness gripping the novel to her chest and stayed in that position for a few moments before she shuffled her feet and looked up at me with a smile.

"I can just lend you the book when I'm done with it so I'll try to enjoy this to the fullest before handing it off to you. While you read the first volume I'll move on to the second and when you finish the first volume I'd love to sit down and talk about it with you."

"I'll be looking forward to it. I'll be sure to check the library every couple of days and be on the lookout for the novel."

A soft angelic giggle soon broke out from the girl in front of me that seemed to give the area around us a lively mood.

"You don't have to do that. I can just give you my contact information then I can message you whenever I finish, then you can pick the novel up at the library as soon as it becomes available."

I couldn't help but feel a mix of happiness and nervousness at the notion. The fact that I was going to soon be making a friend with someone who shared a common interest with me.

'And didn't see fit to insult me in every sentence.'

After that stray thought my thoughts once again steered towards Horikita and wished she could partake in the moment as well.

'She also enjoys novels so I wonder if she would have the same level of excitement as us.'

"Thank you, I really appreciate you doing that for me. However before you give me your contact information what's your name? I can't exactly put your name in my phone with no name."

"Technically I could since I don't have anyone else's contact information in my phone but she doesn't have to know that. Speaking of, I still haven't put in Kushida's information and I don't

think I will anytime soon.'

"Oh, how rude of me. It's just after finding a kindred spirit in the joys of literature I lost myself in excitement and forgot to introduce myself."

She straightened herself up and gave a brief bow before giving me a benevolent smile while giving me her name.

"It's Hiyori Shiina, but please call me Hiyori."

I returned the bow before responding in kind.

"Mine is Kiyotaka Ayanokouji. It's a pleasure to meet you Hiyori-San."

Hiyori then smiled before her phone went off in her pocket. She gave a quick apology before taking it out with her eyes widening at what she saw.

"I'm sorry to cut introductions short Ayanokouji-kun but that's my alarm to return to the dorms. I set it in case I lose track of time since the library is about to close soon. Yesterday I lost track of time and stayed until they closed and got threatened that I'd be banned from entering the library for the rest of the month."

I couldn't help but feel a hint of sadness at our meeting having to be cut short but was soon pushed away as Hiyori exchanged contact information with me.

I accompanied Hiyori to the receptionist who then checked out the both of us. Hiyori's face lit up when the receptionist rang up her book. Not even the monotone way in which the receptionist gave her a slip that told her which date to return the book by before she gets fined could hamper her spirits.

Soon it was my turn and I picked up a copy of 'The Great Gatsby' which was where I saw 'To Kill a Mockingbird.' earlier.

After getting my slip of paper accompanied with the same warning I made my way towards Hiyori. After saddling up next to her we began to make our way towards the dorm with us making light

conversation along the way.

As we were talking I came to find out that Hiyori was in C-class and that like myself was a recluse and that one of her favorite writers was Raymond Chandler.

Apparently her original goal was to acquire one of his books but when she checked the library yesterday none of his books were on the shelves and she tried her luck today to find one.

"I checked online and it said one of his books was in stock but when I went to go search for it the book was already snatched up sadly. But if it wasn't for that then I wouldn't have found this little gem.

She shook her arms in emphasis, which included the novel we were able to grasp earlier, when she finished her sentence.

We soon made it to the dormitories where we parted ways as I excused myself to check my mailbox for mail as I forgot to search it the first day of school.

She told me that when she checked hers the day before it contained a calendar that contained important dates such as when breaks and exam days were.

Upon collecting the calendar I made my way up to my room and flipped the calendar to the correct date and thankfully found some thumbtacks in my desk drawer and set the calendar up on the wall above the desk.

Afterwards I booted my laptop up and set it up with the charger plugged into it on my desk. I was able to access the internet from the laptop which would help serve me and I soon shut the laptop before sitting on my bed to take a moment to relax.

I sat there for a few moments before my gaze gravitated to the wireless landline phone that was connected to my dorm.

I looked at the phone and read the quick dials available and clicked the button that would put me through to the front desk receptionist and asked for a simple request.

"Can you put my call through to the room number that Suzune Horikita resides in. I need to ask her for the notes from today's class and I entered her contact information wrong."

After my request I was soon put through to another line which heralded its arrival with a digital beep.

After three beeps the line on the other end picked up and a tired and confused voice answered me.

"Hello, this is Suzune Horikita, who is this and what are you calling for?"

'Even after the stress she went through earlier she still has the energy to proudly answer the phone.'

"It's Ayanokouji. I was calling to make sure you got back to the dorms safely and was hoping to hear your condition improved after earlier."

Silence rang from the other end of the line and I would've thought the line was cut if it wasn't for the distinct absence of a click and the long beep of a dead line.

"...I made it back as you can tell and why did you see it fit to call me so late Ayanokouji-kun."

"I was worried about you especially after your sudden exit. It seemed to happen after the student council president made his speech and if my memory serves me right the same thing happened on the first day of school during the entrance ceremony."

"How I reacted is none of your concern and you will see to it that you will forget about what happened."

"Is that person your brother?"

" "

Silence once again rang out over the other end and I knew I was going to get nowhere so I repressed a sigh that was bubbling up and went to end the conversation without having Horikita blow up on

me."

"I'm sorry if I pushed too far there I didn't mean to. If you want to talk about this another day we can. Plus this seems more like a conversation to have in person."

"..."

Silence continued to come from the other end of the line and so I began to give her my farewells.

"Goodnight Horikita I hope you have a good rest of your night."

"..."

Letting loose my sigh this time I began to take the phone away from my ear before Horikita responded in a soft voice that I nearly didn't catch.

"We can talk about it another day. I don't know when but... Anyways goodnight Ayanokouji-kun. And thank you for checking up on me."

A click was soon heard being accompanied along with a long beep signaling the end of the phone call.

A/N: Well here's another chapter. And now this story is officially my longest and most successful story to date. There's probably a connection there but that's besides the point.

Also sorry if there was a severe lack of Horikita but I am

planning on this being a sort of novelization/retelling of COTE except with a relationship forming between Ayanokouji and Horikita.

I found this out awhile back and was glad I could put this in my story but there are surviving copies of the first Japanese translations of 'Journey to the West' in Woodblock. The artist who does the art in the novel is Katsushika Hokusai who is the same one who drew the famous artwork of 'The Great Wave off Kanagawa'. Below is a link to the original YouTube video where I found this out and a link to a website containing the complete Japanese translation with every page scanned. I highly suggest you guys check it out just for the art alone.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nICCn22AAKg>

https://archive.wul.waseda.ac.jp/kosho/he21/he21_02500/

Anyways thank you everyone for continuing to support me and thank you for the support you guys have no idea how much it means to me. Once again thank you for reading and I hope everyone takes care.

Bonus A/N: Ran into troubles because of the link in the description causing my description and story title to get deleted. Hopefully the same doesn't happen to this chapter when I try to post it.

Chapter 9

Reads: 3018 | Votes: 118 | Comments: 49

"Oh, good morning Ayanokouji-kun! What a surprise to run into you this morning."

The bubbly and friendly voice of Kushida greeted me as soon as the elevator doors opened to my floor. I stared for a moment and gave a quiet greeting as Kushida's eyes followed me the entire time as I walked into the elevator.

The elevator doors soon closed as I got in the carriage and an awkward silence soon washed over the two of us which was swiftly broken by Kushida's bubbly personality.

"How've you been enjoying the school so far Ayanokouji-kun? I don't know about you but I've already spent a lot of my points already."

"The school has been treating me well so far. Is it really a good idea to spend a lot of your points that quickly? I think it'd be better to save them up."

"You're funny Ayanokouji-kun, did you already forget that we get 100,000 points every month? I say that it'd be a waste not to spend all of the points we get or else they'd be going to waste, plus it'd be kinda rude not to use the school's generosity don't you think?"

"I suppose."

I hesitated at what I was going to say next before continuing on.

"This school is meant to prepare us for the future so budgeting and money management must be a part of that. I think it'd be better to save your points anyway since it'll help us after we graduate."

For a moment Kushida cutely put her index finger to her lips

thinking about what I said before she perked up with a wide smile on her face.

"I guess you're right. Ya know you're pretty smart Ayanokouji-kun! I would've thought you'd be someone who would just try to coast by but you're actually pretty smart when you want to be."

"Was that supposed to be a compliment?"

I couldn't help but voice my concerns at the backhanded compliment I just received.

Kushida broke out into a cute laugh as soon as the elevator doors in front of us dinged open and revealed the ground floor to the both of us. We soon stepped out walking side by side together towards our class. While we were walking Kushida was trying to calm her laughter by my side.

Eventually she was able to get her breathing under control by the time we exited the dorms.

"You know you're really funny, Ayanokouji-kun. I'm sure you make all of your friends laugh like this, right?"

I couldn't help but feel as if I was being stabbed through the back with an arrow at her words. She unknowingly hit a very soft spot for me and couldn't help but wilt at her words.

"While I appreciate the vote of confidence in my humor I sadly don't have any friends to share it with."

"Really you don't have any other friends? Despite your words from the other day I could've sworn you and Horikita would be close friends especially since you guys have spent everyday together so far.

Kushida then leaned in close with her chest pressing up against my arm and she got up on her toes to whisper in my ear conspiratorial.

"You know you two practically seem inseparable right now. Oh don't tell me! Are you two dating!?"

I couldn't help but recoil not only at the rising tone of excitement in Kushida's voice but the sheer ludicrousness I just heard come out of her mouth. I couldn't help but stop in my tracks and stare dumbfounded at Kushida who was watching me with an excited smile that didn't reach her inquisitive eyes.

Despite her friendly demeanor and the innocent question she asked I couldn't help but feel something off in the tone she asked her question which served to further throw me off.

"KUSHIDA-CHAN!"

Thankfully I was soon saved by an unexpected hero.

We both turned to look at the newcomer who called out Kushida's name from a distance. I thought I saw Kushida's smile subtly twitch on her lips, but it may have just been a trick of the light.

"Ne, Kushida-chan, would you mind if I accompanied you to school?"

The high pitched voice of Ike gradually began to get closer and closer with the intention of interacting with Kushida. While I was slightly hurt that I was completely ignored I couldn't help but feel grateful as it gave me an escape to this conversation.

"It seems like you have company. I'm not too familiar with him and I don't do good with new people so I'll be on my way."

I began walking off and at a quickened pace to leave Kushida behind me after the white-lie I told her. While I have become acquainted with Ike the day prior neither of us are partially close to one another. Besides what I did know of Ike, my act might get me in his good graces as he might think I was helping his chances with Kushida if I left him with her alone.

Overall it was pretty advantageous to escape while I could. While I may gain Kushida's ire I can easily pass it off as me being too shy to interact with others and that can't really be blamed on me.

"Wait Ayano-"

"KUSHIDA-CHAN!"

Kushida's protest to prevent me from leaving was cut off by Ike's call. I gave a quick glance over my shoulder and saw Ike rapidly approaching Kushida who's smile seemed to be straining by the second. Ike soon approached and I turned my head away from the two as whatever conversation they began having was lost to me as I had put enough distance between us.

Thankfully the rest of my walk to the main building was undisturbed but the same couldn't be said to my walk from there to the classroom. I was walking up the stairs to my class when I was suddenly run into by another student who was rushing down the stairs.

"Tch, watch where you're going you spaz."

The person I ran into was a girl with an abrasive voice that matched her personality. She had short cerulean hair styled into a bob with angry violet eyes that were drilling into me.

I let loose a quiet apology as I tried to move past her.

However I was stopped at her arm striking out and grabbing a hold of my blazer.

"You should apologize for bumping into me, you klutz."

It seems that my words from earlier seemed to fail to reach her ears. However before I could even open my mouth to respond her grip suddenly increased on my arm with an uncomfortable pressure.

"You should learn some manners, or do you need to be taught them?"

"Could you unhand my classmate, or are you simply an ogre who uses violence to solve all of his problems?"

Suddenly a voice boomed out behind us on the stairwell. The voice belonged to Horikita who was looking at the cerulean haired girl with as much venom as I've ever seen Horikita muster.

"Oh, come to save your boyfriend have you? You would think with someone to constantly whip him when he messes up he'd learn some manners by now. But I guess not everyone can handle the responsibilities of having a pet."

"You've started running out of things to say and now you've started to project your deviancy onto others in order to shame them. You should learn to not be ashamed of your deviancy. I'm sure there's plenty of boys at this school that would put you in a collar. And going by your attitude it seems you need to be trained like an animal."

After her words the cerulean haired girl let go of my arm in order to fully turn her body towards Horikita with sparks seemingly flying between the two as they began staring each other down and sizing one another up.

The tension was thick enough that it could be cut with a knife and they seemed ready to boil over as the cerulean haired girl took a step forward down the stairs towards Horikita.

"Oi, Ibuki what do you think you're doing?"

'What seems to be up with all the dramatic and sudden entrances today. Having all these coincidences happen back to back is starting to freak me out.'

My thoughts stopped roaming as the voice that boomed out behind me on top of the stairs began walking down the stairs behind me getting increasingly closer with each step.

Soon a boy slightly shorter than me with magenta hair and piercing black eyes was positioned to my right looking down at the now named Ibuki.

"Are you trying to get expelled since it seems you want to fight out in the open so bad. Oh, let me guess this is how you need to get ready after I said I can take you anytime, anywhere. So you're just doing some foreplay to get us started, let's hope your legs are still usable afterwards."

A cruel grin broke out on the face of the magenta haired student which only seemed to grow more wicked as Ibuki was now shaking with rage. It wouldn't be farfetched to think she was soon to be foaming at the mouth with the amount of disdain and withheld anger being directed at the student beside me.

"You really think you're top shit huh? I'm disgusted to even be put into the same class as you. I'd rather be put in the same class as Romeo and Juliet over here. I'd rather deal with their lovey dovey bullshit than your perpetual bullshit Ryuen.

The now named Ryuen faced me and turned his attention towards me for the first time since arriving. He gave me a onceover before swinging his arm around me and grabbing a firm hold of my shoulder before addressing Ibuki.

"Kukuku, this shrimp pissed you off? I know it's that time of the month for you but trust me not everyone is trying to get in your pants. Plus I doubt this guy right here has even successfully had a conversation with a female without stuttering."

After his words his glare hardened as the pressure on my shoulder increased.

"Before anything else happens I would like for Ibuki here to apologize for not only trying to assault one of my classmates but wasting everyone's time with her actions. Since you seem to be the one who's had his dog come off it's leash I expect you should hold responsibility for its actions Ryuen-san.

"And who are you to tell me what to do? You don't have the right to give me commands just because you have a pretty face. However, you look intriguing; tell me what is your name? If you share it with me, I will reserve a space in my bed for both you and me."

Despite me staying uninvolved for most of this encounter I couldn't help but feel a spring of anger rise within me at Ryuen's words. My previous apathetic composure threatened to break at his words. My state of mind only worsened upon seeing the seething anger that was on Horikita's face after his comment.

Before I could think my hand began to reach up to grab at Ryuen's hand which was still on my shoulder.

However before I could grasp at Ryuen's arm he suddenly retracted his arm and began to walk back up the stairs and gave a glance over his shoulder down at the three of us.

"Kukuku, while I would love to keep you ladies entertained, I have some other dogs that I require my attention in order to keep them in line. And Ibuki don't you dare do this again. I would hate for Class-C to lose someone so early in the year. Especially someone as talented as you."

Despite the end-of-sentence compliment, Ryuen's evil smirk throughout the conversation served to undercut whatever relevant thing he had to say that wasn't an insult.

Ryuen soon crested the top of the stairwell and began to disappear from view as the rest of us remained where we were on the stairwell.

"Tch, I'm through with this."

After her words Ibuki began to walk down the rest of the staircase and past Horikita seemingly intending on either not arriving to class or arriving late.

After her departure the stairway was now empty save for me and Horikita. I gave her a onceover and she seemed to have recovered from the conversation and continued watching Ibuki leave far after I lost sight of her.

After a few moments Horkita turned towards me and began gazing at me.

We both began staring at one another with me noticing her usual frigid and calculated glare was slightly warmer than I last remembered it.

"Trouble seems to follow you Ayanokouji-kun. Maybe I should distance myself from you while I can before any more of this trouble rubs off on me."

"This is the first time any such event has happened so I don't know where you obtained this preconceived notion based on no evidence."

"So you're telling me you haven't run into any kind of trouble similar to what happened just now?"

"Absolutely not."

"You're gonna have to try better next time you try to lie to me Ayanokouji-kun."

"I may have had inconvenient encounters before this but none of them have resulted in near violence."

"So you finally admit to trouble following you where you go? I really should stop associating with you now while I have the chance."

"Glad to see you're doing better in comparison to yesterday."

Horikita gave me a slight glare before closing her eyes and giving a soft huff before walking up the stairs. As she made it to my side I began walking up the stairs while keeping pace with her."

We then began making our way to our classroom in the relatively empty hallways. While we began walking in silence I couldn't help but take interest in something that I didn't see earlier due to everything that was happening.

"What's with the braid in your hair Horikita-san? Is there some kind of event today?"

After my words Horikita's body seemed to freeze up with her face breaking out into a large blush at my words.

"It-t-t-t's none of your business Ayano-ko-kouji-kun!"

"With a reaction like that it must be something. You can tell me what it is. Plus you don't have to worry about me telling anyone since you're the only person I'm acquainted with."

"Like hell if that's any reason to tell you anything. Besides, nothing special is happening. I just decided to change my hairstyle."

We continued on walking at a more sedate pace with Horikita's blush still tinting her face. Just as it seemed as if her blush was finally about to go down as our destination was a few feet away I decided to share my thoughts once again.

"You look rather pretty with the braid in your hair. I enjoy this look more than your previous."

Horikita's face bloomed once more into the deepest shade of red I've ever seen on her face. I wouldn't be surprised if steam was going to start blowing out of her ears soon.

We soon made our way to the door to our classroom and as I opened the door and crossed the divide I barely caught the meek whisper that came from behind me.

"He likes it huh?"

I turned around to look at Horikita to try and confirm it was her who said what I just heard but when I did most of her blush was gone with her looking ahead with the usual iciness that characterized them.

When Horikita's stare met mine as I turned around, her previously icy glare thawed and she began to look at me with warmth in her eyes.

I blinked at the unexpected sight and when I opened my eyes the previously icy glare had returned along with her signature scowl.

"Do I have something on my face Ayanokouji-kun? Or have you relapsed back into your perverted ways?"

"No but I am rather disappointed that you haven't been able to come up with new material. It gets pretty tiring hearing the same thing over and over again."

"It's rather unfortunate that you don't want to hear the truth, Ayanokouji-kun. Maybe you should look to reform yourself and

maybe I wouldn't have to constantly reference your continued deviance."

During our conversation we began making our way towards our desks and started to settle in and set our needed supplies on our desks and our school bags in our desks.

Our back and forward banter continued on until Sae-Sensei walked through the other door to the classroom briefly after the bell resonated throughout the classroom.

Classes proceeded as normal and throughout I would take glances at Horikita. While doing so I noticed that her usually obscured face was now mostly revealed thanks to the braid taking away most of the obscuring hair on the left side of her face.

While I continued my observation of Horikita the teacher began writing a complicated formula on the board and Horikita leaned forward ever so slightly and slightly squinted her eyes in concentration. Soon after she tucked the braid hanging at the side of her face behind her ear and held it there while she began to write.

Despite me being required to take notes at the moment it was the furthest thing from my mind at the moment because I was currently enamored with Horikita. Meanwhile I couldn't help but hear a singular word bounce around my head after her actions.

'Cute.'

A/N: If anyone noticed I specifically didn't mention the braid in Horikita's hair when I first introduced her so that I could include a moment like this. I hope it was worth the payoff.

Anyways the plot should be speeding up just a tiny bit at the moment. Also I will not lie to all of you until Chapter 5 or 6, I completely forgot that a lot of stuff like the first pool scene happens before the Class point reveal in the LN. While I don't have the hate that some people do for the anime it's pretty interesting that they are so different.

Speaking of differences between the two I rather enjoy both for what they are. I guess I might be singing a different tune if I read the LN first but who knows. But also one of my favorite pieces of media has major differences between the LN, Manga and Anime. Like they all follow the same story but will have massively different plot points or new content all together so I suppose I'm desensitized to 'unfaithful adaptations.'

Anyways once again I'm rambling in the AN, what else is new? When I post this I will hit 3K so I will thank you guys now for that and I appreciate the support as always. I hope you guys enjoyed the chapter and I hope everyone takes care.

Chapter 10

Reads: 3396 | Votes: 127 | Comments: 48

School soon started to gain a sense of normalcy with all the first-years beginning to settle in after arriving. A week has gone by with classes being just as lenient as they were before.

My class continued as they were before with not a sign of calming their behavior any time soon. I tried taking action by airing my suspicions to Kushida but she seemed more worried about trying to befriend me and Horikita than process what I said back then.

If my suspicion is correct then she or perhaps Karuizawa or Hirata could stop what's coming on the horizon. Kushida is the best option considering that starting from day one she had a wide enough series of friends and connections to know that me and Horikita spent that evening together.

Speaking of which I have yet to tell Horikita of my suspicions however there doesn't seem to be a need to do so as she's naturally a frugal person with her points. So far my point total is pretty comfortable with most of my expenses coming from buying half of the ingredients for food with Horikita.

Thankfully the price to make your own food is rather cheap with the only better alternative point wise for food would be to eat the free lunch set in the cafeteria. I gave the set a onceover the meal selection when Horikita was unable to make us lunch and needless to say it's deplorable.

The lunch set was enough to sustain yourself off of the bare minimum possible to survive. Considering how frugal the school seems to be it's rather cruel to give the free option such a poor standard of quality. This along with only being able to take a set amount of free items in convenience stores served to heighten my suspicions and give weight to my deductions.

I stopped my thoughts as I finished eating and began packing up the lunch Horikita made for me. Today was going to be a change in the previously established routine of classes. Today was going to be a physical education lesson at one of the pools in the school.

As the class as a whole began making our way to the pool there seemed to be an air of excitement blanketing itself over the class. The feeling was coming from some of the girls who seemed excited to try out the pool as it's been closed since we got to the school so it would be the first time we could use it.

The others I felt excitement from was in the form of a majority of the boys in class with my acquaintances Yamauchi and Ike practically vibrating with excitement and lust.

My seatmate walking besides me seemed to also notice if her face shifting into disgust was any indication.

"Despite your desperation to make friends I sincerely hope you end up having no relation with those two. If you do then any and all respect I have for you would be instantly washed away."

I felt myself break out into a cold sweat at the threat being thrown my way. Soon I couldn't help but sense a scorching feeling in my pocket from the phone I'd been using to communicate with the referenced party.

"It makes me happy to know that I've earned your regard, Horikita-san. Is this a sign that we're about to become friends? My heart can't stop racing with delight at the thought."

"If you try and act like this to all the people you try to befriend, I'm confident that you will get through the next three years of school without having made a single friend. Which would include me on that list."

Despite her harsh words the intent behind them was lessened due to the slight blush on her cheeks.

It's been a favorite pastime of mine to make Horikita blush since I first arrived at the school. It makes me happy to see the normally

composed girl get thrown off her game. It makes no difference whether the satisfaction stems from genuine enjoyment or spiteful retaliation for her harsh words.

However, before I could press my attack we arrived at our destination and were split into locker rooms to change.

~Break~

I made my way to the boys locker room and decided to change as quickly as I could in order to not get caught up in any trouble.

However as luck would have it seems as if I was too slow in changing and was called out to by Ike.

"Ayanokouji-kun, please come over here; it's really crucial."

I hesitated and thought about just leaving and exiting towards the pool area but decided against it and began walking over to Ike with a sigh.

'It would be best not to burn bridges with my classmates despite me having a bad feeling about this.'

As I arrived next to Ike we were soon joined by Yamauchi, and another student who Ike introduced as Sotomura, however he goes by a nickname called 'Professor.'

The Professor arrived with a sheet of paper that was a spreadsheet with all of the females names on the y-axis with all the boys on the x-axis. Certain boxes on the spreadsheet were filled in connection with two of the names together.

"This is a betting pool on which girl has the biggest chest. You're the last one we've asked so you're the only one who hasn't bet yet."

Despite his words I saw blanks under certain boys who were Koenji and Hirata. I can understand why Koenji's choice was left blank as talking about anything but himself to Koenji seemed like a lost cause. Meanwhile the more interesting one being Hirata was more ambiguous.

'Did they just not ask him in fear of him ratting them out to the girls or is it because he refused because he didn't feel comfortable with betting on who has the biggest size. To be fair I'm having reservations with it at the moment.'

"With all the money put in you have a chance to win 20,000 points!"

Obviously it was just a trick to get me into the betting pool seeing as there are bets on the same girl so the prize pool will inevitably be lower than what Ike said.

With a sigh I decided to join and decided to pick the girl with the highest odds as I saw her name appear the most.

After I put my bet in I exited the locker room in my school assigned swimming trunks with a slight hint of shame hanging over me and walked out in my school swimsuit.

When I made it to the main pool area most of the guys were already waiting around with no sign of the girls in sight.

Discontent started brewing between most of the boys with a few exceptions keeping their cool. Soon the discontent reached a zenith as Ike exited the locker room and made his complaints known to everyone who could hear him.

"Ahhhhhhh, where are the girls! I want to see them glistening in the pool while wearing their swimsuits already!"

"Don't you think it'd be better not to show such over the top desperation and perviness?"

Surprisingly the voice of Sudo spoke up and began giving Ike a reality check on his behavior.

"If you keep acting like this I doubt any of the girls in our class let alone the rest of the school will be interested in you dude."

'So you're telling me the wall of bricks in the shape of a human has a better grasp on females than Ike? Truly is there any way for Ike to improve himself? If he's getting legitimate advice from the

confrontational Sudo I don't think there's much hope for him.'

As those two began having a back and forth, female voices began to be heard from the stands which hosted only one other boy in the form of the Professor who was staying up there to 'measure the tea cups.'

Just saying that makes a disgusted chill run down my spine.

More female voices began to resonate from the stands and eight girls walked out and began taking seats. Intriguingly Karuizawa who was the leader of the girls in the class decided to sit out. Even more interesting was the fact that she didn't impose her will upon the rest of the girls and also make them sit out. Or maybe she encountered pushback.

Either way nearly half of the girls in class decided to sit out and the disappointment radiating off the boys was palpable.

"Oh wow, the pool is a lot bigger than I thought!"

Then just as the boys around me lost hope they suddenly all gained a second wind as Kushida abruptly entered the pool area and

Ahem

bounced her way to the shallow end of the before running in and diving towards deeper waters.

With that the floodgates were opened as most of the boys surrounding me began to jump in after Kushida and they were soon joined by the rest of the girls making their way out of their locker room.

I just sighed and walked over to the pool's edge, where I sat with my knees pulled up to my chest and my arms on top of my knees, a few feet away from the water.

I sat there watching everyone who was taking part enjoy their free time in the pool before our class's teacher arrived.

I couldn't help but feel jealous at the fun that my classmates in the

pool were having splashing one another. I then turned my gaze to the bleachers where most of the girls were sitting together and excitedly talking to one another while occasionally showing the others something on their phone. There were a few outliers who sat away from the main group in the form of a pink haired girl with glasses and the blue haired girl I spotted last week.

My urge to join was stifled by the fact that I'd made little progress in terms of making friends, which was the primary reason as to why I hadn't joined the rest in the pool as I wanted to prevent an awkward atmosphere arising from my inclusion.

"It's rather entertaining to see you sitting here like a sea urchin while wishing you could make friends."

Horikita walked up next to me while staring me down with her usual scowl. As she did so I couldn't help but feel my breath hitch at the sight in front of me.

Horikita stood before me in the school issued swimsuit that clung tightly to her form with the beauty of a ballerina dressed in a leotard. She stood there regally while choreographing a ballet in the subtle muscle twitches of movement she unconsciously made.

Horikita was clearly in great shape as her slim figure had toned muscles in her legs and arms. She also had a rather toned

"Ayanokouji-kun..."

I stopped my staring and began looking up towards Horikita preparing for the inevitable scowl that was going to be staring down at me.

Instead I saw Horikita with a meek expression on her face filled with uncertainty as she hesitated to continue speaking. She had the braid on the left side of her face in her hands and was fumbling it around while trying to find her words.

"By chance do you exercise or play sports? You seem in rather good shape. Better than what your figure would suggest."

Despite the fact that she had finally gotten her inquiry out, she was

unable to meet my gaze as she continued to manipulate her braid in her hands.

"Ah, not really. I do light exercises such as pushups and situps in my room but that's about it. I don't do anything too strenuous."

"Is that so.... you look extremely fit so I doubt that light exercising is the only thing you do if you're as fit as you are."

"Maybe I just got lucky with genetics since I don't do any arduous exercises. However it is rather concerning that you are so focused on my body. Perhaps you're the pervert after all and now you're finally showing your true colors."

The previously meek Horikita suddenly bounced back away from me with her face crimson accompanied by what I could've sworn was a small 'eep'.

"Y-y-you say tha-a-a-t bu-t-t-t you're the o-one who painted my questions with a depraved undertone."

"You say that but the way you're stuttering out your protests seems to tell a different story."

To drive in the effect of my banter I covered my chest with my hands and turned my body slightly away from her with a huff.

"Now that I know to fear for my chastity around you I can now take the appropriate steps to prevent you from acting out on your debauched nature."

My jab seemed to have been more devastating than I thought because Horikita began to mumble incoherently to herself as her body began to heat up and turn red. Instead of firing words back she instead dropped to the floor and curled her legs up in front of her and wrapped her arms around her legs while hiding her face.

Deciding to take my victory I turned back to observing the others in the pool.

My people watching soon ended however as I heard Horikita incoherently mumbling next to me.

"Did you say something Horikita-san?"

"...n...u...c....r"

"What did you say? Can you please speak up?"

"C...n...o...o...ser"

With a groan, I trudged over to Horikita and took a seat next to her to hear what she had to say. In my displeasure at having to relocate, I sat near enough to her that our shoulders briefly touched when I moved next to her. However, there was enough room between us to leave a slight gap.

"..."

However instead of getting an answer to what she was saying she instead maintained her silence. I observed her face which covered all but her eyes into her arms and legs. Due to this I was able to see the soft look in her eyes as she mindlessly stared out into the water.

Unfortunately the peaceful atmosphere between the two of us was soon ruined by a third party.

"Ne, Ayanokouji-kun, Horikita-san, why aren't you two joining us? We're having a lot of fun and I think you two should join in with us."

The previously meek Horikita perked up suddenly switched to her signature scowl in the face of Kushida. Kushida swam her way towards us and stood against the inside edge of the pool.

"I don't see the point of mucking around in the water with people I don't know. Plus, what would the instructor think if they came in and saw us playing in the water? It would make a horrible first impression."

"You make a good point, but given how lenient the school's instructors have been thus far, I don't see why that should change now, therefore initial impressions don't seem to matter at this point, do they?"

"That may be true but I hold myself to a higher regard than what the rest of the class holds themselves to. I'd rather make a good first impression with my instructor than going around and gaining their ire. Additionally such trivial activities are pointless to me."

Seemingly satisfied in her attempts to try and get Horikita to open up to her, Kushida then turned her sights to me.

"Why don't you hop in Ayanokouji-kun? You look like you could clear the pool in a few strokes with how toned you look."

After her words Kushida moved to get a better look at my figure which in turn made it so that her breasts were laying on top of the edge of the pool in full display to me and Horikita.

At the sight I couldn't help but stare for a few moments before avoiding my gaze trying to look anywhere but in front of me.

'It would be an insult to imply they're bigger than Horikita's. It's difficult to even make a comparison between the two.'

"Sorry, I don't enjoy swimming that much. Plus I don't want to get in anyone's way."

"Don't worry about that besides you never know how much fun you could have if you don't try to have fun with everyone."

After her words Kushida pulled herself out of the water and brought herself in front of me and began trying to grab onto me with the intention of dragging me into the water.

'I can't help but feel as if my life is in danger at the moment.'

As Kushida was failing to drag me into the water I was able to see past her and spot most of the boys in the pool staring at me with killing intent enough to kill multiple elephants if I could be affected by their glares.

However, that was the least of my worries at the moment as I felt the temperature around me dip as Horikita began leveling me and Kushida with a cold glare.

'What did I do? I'm the one being literally dragged against the will at the moment.'

"Would you stop, Kushida-san, Ayanokouji-kun clearly wants to stay where he is. I don't see how dragging him into a social situation is going to get him to make friends. He can barely talk in complete sentences half the time without sighing so I don't see a point in your actions."

Kushida who finally began to tire out from trying to move me looked over at Horikita and gave her a peppy smile.

"Horikita-san, that is not the way to communicate with someone. Besides, I believe Ayanokouji-kun needs a little initiative in order to become one of the most popular students in school. He did place fifth among the girls in the first year ikemen ratings."

"I don't know whether I should be happy about this information or worried that there have already been school wide rankings that have been done without the boys' knowledge."

"Well it's relatively harmless it's not like we're hurting anyone it's just a little bit of fun."

"And what if the boys made similar lists about the girls like 'Who's the cutest.?'"

Without a shred of hesitation and with a slight tint of darkness to her eyes Kushida immediately responded.

"They'd be worse than trash and would be treated as such."

I couldn't help but let a shiver go down my spine at the bluntness of her answer and how the usually happy and amicable Kushida turned cold for a second.

"Alright, everyone gather at the foot of the pool with the swimming lanes."

Our conversation was soon interrupted by our P.E. teacher who finally arrived by walking into the pool area.

"24 people, I see. I expected more people, but I guess it works."

There clearly were students skipping class and sitting out, but he didn't seem to mind.

"It's a bit sudden, but I'll be examining your abilities today. You guys are going to be showing your swimming abilities today. I'm going to need you guys to warm up with a short 50 meter swim"

"But, sensei, I can't swim..."

A boy regretfully raised his hand and spoke out.

"I'll make sure you learn to swim before the end of the summer as your teacher. Don't be concerned."

"It's not necessary to learn to swim... We won't be able to go to the beach anyhow."

"That's a pity. It doesn't matter if you can't swim right now; I'll make sure everyone gets better. Learning to swim will be quite beneficial. I can assure you of that."

I couldn't help but arch my eyebrow at the teacher's words. It seems as if swimming is going to be a part of our future curriculum going off of Sensei's words and how this is a mandatory class we have which breaks us from our usual classes.

Everyone soon began to get in one of the lanes with those unable to find a lane creating a line behind one to wait their turn in warming up with a 50 meter swim.

When it got to my turn I calmly swam the 50 meters with little fuss. However not everyone was as collected as I was.

"Hehehe, a complete victory. Did you see? My super swimming!"

Swimming casually, Ike got out of the pool with a self-satisfied look.

'No, you weren't all that different from the others.'

"Anyway, it looks like mostly everyone can swim."

"Sorry, Sensei. Back in middle school I was called the Flying Fish after all."

"I see. Then you guys can immediately start competing against each other then. 50m freestyle, separate yourselves by gender. I'll give the first place winner a bonus: 5,000 points. On the other hand, the person who comes in last place will get supplementary lessons so prepare yourselves."

Despite his earlier admissions of getting everyone to the point of being able to swim, our sensei began wearing a sadistic grin after announcing the punishment.

"Because there aren't too many girls, I'll split you guys into two groups of 5 and give the fastest time the overall victory. For the boys, I'll take the top 5 times and then hold a final round."

'I wonder why it's taken this long until we've run into a situation where skipping out on classes was met with a punishment? You would think there would be more of these in place to prevent students from skipping class. Due to this it seems that my previous theories seem to become more credible with each passing hour.'

There were 16 boys and 10 girls, excluding those who didn't know how to swim. When the girls started their race, the boys sat on the sidelines and started to cheer for... no, evaluate the girls.

"Kushida-chan Kushida-chan Kushida-chan Kushida-chan Kushida-chan. Hahahaha."

It seems Ike has been completely enamored with Kushida if his shouts and perverted giggles are anything to go by.

"You might want to tone it down a notch Ike, It's making me uncomfortable standing near you right now."

"B-but Kushida-chan is right in front of me about to jump into the water with her massive tits stuffed into a school swimsuit. HOW CAN I NOT BE EXCITED!."

What made me seize up slightly was how Horikita was getting cheers from some of the guys. Despite Horikita's cold personality which has inevitably been spread around by now she does have amazing features and considering what a lot of the boys seem to be here for they've noticed and are taking it in.

"Everyone, make sure to remember this sight! Today's fap material has been secured!"

"Yea!"

After those words were said along with a chorus of agreements I couldn't help but feel the blood in my veins slightly boil. I felt a red hot pressure settle in the center of my forehead that began to painfully spread. Soon my nails began digging into my palms.

I soon took notice of my behavior and began to calm myself and hoping for today's class to end as quickly as possible.

The whistle blew, and the five females dashed into the fray. Horikita is on the second lane. She took the lead at the start and kept it at a safe distance. She took first position with confidence.

'Oh! Horikita did it!'

She sped by at a blistering 28 seconds. That time is incredible, since it could easily qualify someone to compete in the Olympic Games which shows Horikita's incredible physical prowess.

She soon pulled herself out of the pool with practiced grace which had the consequence of showcasing her backside. Her exit was soon followed by the rest of the girls in her heat who also began exiting the pool.

'It's quite the sight. Wouldn't have imagined Horikita's it to be so big..... or bouncy.'

Despite myself I couldn't help but let my thoughts wander. I soon shook my head to begin to rid myself of those intrusive thoughts.

Cheer removed me from my thoughts which served to get anger rising in me once again but was quickly stamped down after the

boys began cheering once the girl's backs were on display after getting out of the water.

The second race soon followed which saw Kushida in lane 4. The boys were waving and cheering with smiles on their faces for her victory.

The second race had commenced. It was a rather one-sided situation. The race was won by Onodera by a large margin. Her timing of 26 seconds was unquestionably the fastest. Kushida finished in fourth position with a timing of 31 seconds, which was a respectable effort.

I went to go talk to Horikita who had gotten out of the pool and began walking towards me after the second race finished.

"It's unfortunate that you couldn't grab first place. But It's rather impressive you were so close to beating a swim team member."

"I appreciate the praise but I didn't mind if I won or lost that competition, mainly that I did the best I could."

"That's rather mature of you."

"Do you think I was something other than mature Ayanokouji-kun?"

"No, I'm just surprised at such a level headed answer from someone as prideful as you. I took you as someone who would hate to lose and wanted to be at the top of everything."

"While it is true I hate losing it mainly comes to activities I am confident at. For example I am confident that I will score perfectly on any and all written tests with physical tests coming afterwards. So the fact that there is someone better than me physically means little to me as I know I can't be touched in written tests.

"There's the confidence I was expecting."

"Speaking of confidence, how do you feel about your chances?"

"I have enough to know I won't come in last."

"...While not an incorrect goal to strive for, I believe you would do it by setting better goals for yourself. Coming in last while the worst you can achieve shouldn't be the standard to beat."

"I don't really like to compete with others, plus I like to avoid trouble. So being able to not come in last is the goal I strive for."

"It's rather disheartening to hear this from you. You could at least try to put a small effort into winning. If you won't do it for yourself at least do it for me as I won't accept my seat partner to make me look bad by showing incompetence."

"Rather encouraging words you've given me. In that case I'll be sure to give it my all!"

"Then I look forward to seeing you sink like a rock and laughing at your failure."

'It seems she detected my sarcasm in my response.'

I then got into my lane which was lane two and got ready to swim. I already gave up on trying to win first place but decided to at least get a respectable time.

To my right was Sudo who I deemed would be impossible to keep up with. I looked around to see the competition and decided I could try and put a tiny bit of effort in and try to get a slightly above average time.

We soon got ready and were sent on our way with Sudo speeding past me in the water. I saw the mass of students swimming to my right and decided to keep ahead of 3/4th's of the pack.

I soon comfortably finished and ended up with a time of 31 seconds which secured me 5th place.

Sudo, who was the frontrunner of my group, ended up gaining the admiration of both the boys and girls due to his impressive time of 25 seconds.

"Sudou, won't you join the swimming club? If you practiced, you'd compete pretty well."

"I plan on just playing basketball. Swimming's just for fun."

Not even breaking a sweat from that small amount of swimming, Sudou calmly got out of the pool.

Soon after squeals were heard by the girls as they reacted in a similar manner to Hirata who made his way to the start line as the boys did to Kushida.

Hirata easily garnered the admiration of the girls due to his slender, well-built frame. The boys seemed to take this as a direct insult as many began making obscene gestures or muttering curses.

Even Sudo joined in on the witch hunt which might be in part due to Hirata stealing the previous spotlight Sudo occupied.

"If you win, I'll make sure to destroy you. I'll show you my full power."

'When did our swimming class become a shonen battle manga?'

The whistle was soon sounded and Hirata jumped in with grace and was able to finish with a time of 26.13. Just barely behind Sudo's time.

Soon the next group got on the starting line and took off with the blonde menace Koenji taking first place with an insane score of 23.22 while singing his own praises before, during, and after the race.

"He's rather full of himself and as it pains me to say it so far it seems unfounded."

Sliding up next to me after the race was Horikita. After the final race with Koenji was complete the gym teacher soon gave out points to each winner and began talking to the bottom scorers in a group about supplementary courses.

"I wonder if there will come a day where he will run out of compliments to give himself. But it wouldn't surprise me if he learned another language just to have a new language just to compliment himself."

A soft giggle rang out beside me after my words and when I turned to look at Horikita her eyes were filled with mirth at my words.

"At least then we wouldn't have to understand him. I'd rather hear him talk incomprehensibly for hours on end than to understand him for 5 minutes."

I gave a soft huff at her words before agreeing with her statement. Afterwards we soon began to make our way to the locker rooms and right before we departed from one another I turned to Horikita.

"I didn't get the chance to tell you earlier but you looked stunning in that swimsuit."

With that I left to go change and chanced a glance over my shoulder which saw Horikita glued to her spot looking at me with embarrassed rage as her whole figure began turning red in embarrassment.

'Huh, maybe I do like swimming after all.'

A/N: Yeah this one took a little longer to come out than I intended. But it came out so that's what matters. Also THE BIG TEN O. Can't believe I made it to 10 chapters posted.

Thankfully I don't have much to say so this will be a rather short AN. I just wanted to share a tool I use that helps me with writing to any authors who read my story and it's called:

Quillbot

It helps with paraphrasing and rewriting your sentences to make them grammatically correct or adding fluency. I've used this whenever I get an idea for a sentence and know it doesn't sound good and want it worded better. Other times I use it to rewrite a sentence from the LN to help steer me in a different direction.

One nice thing you can also do is have the site suggest sentences for you if you get stuck. And it's surprisingly pretty accurate. Usually inserting a name like Horikita or Ayanokouji will let the site know you're talking about COTE and it will generate sentences around it.

I haven't really used that feature for this story since I haven't had problems writing but it may be useful for others who either have a hard time writing/getting their ideas on paper or dealing with writer's block.

Well I said the AN was gonna be short but it was long again regardless. Anyways thank you everyone for the support and thank you for the 400 votes when this story goes up.

Also I never brought this up but thank you for getting this story to top 10 in both the Horikita and Suzune tags. It was also in the top 50 of the cote tag once but that was when I dropped 3 chapters in a day.

Once again thank you guys for reading my story and this AN and I would appreciate the feedback on this chapter especially since I want to know if it was too heavy on the exposition or if I was too sparse with some dialogue. Anyways thank you for the continued support as always it means a lot and take care everyone.

Chapter 11

Reads: 2921 | Votes: 115 | Comments: 29

"Do you want to stop by a café on your way home, Kikyo-chan?"

"All right, un! Let's go!" But wait a minute. "I'd like to ask one more person."

Kushida approached Horikita while placing a book in her purse after inviting one of her female friends.

"Horikita-san. I'm heading to the café with a friend; would you want to join me?"

"I'm not willing to engage in such activities whatsoever."

'And just like that Kushida gets brutally shot down once again.'

This has been a rather common occurrence for the past couple of weeks at school. Kushida would without any hesitation go to invite Horikita and would get rebuked.

'She sure is shameless. She doesn't even lie and say that she has plans for the day.'

"Is that so... Maybe next time then?"

Despite the quick rejection Kushida still had a smile on her face that didn't waver even in the face of the callous words coming from Horikita. She turned from facing Horikita's desk to mine before addressing me.

"What about you Ayanokouji-kun? Do you want to come to the café with me?"

"No it's fine, besides I'd feel out of place with there being an extra person there especially since I don't know who they are."

"Well if you come with us and you get to know her then that wouldn't be a problem anymore now would it? What do you think of that Ayanokouji-kun?"

"Sorry but I should've just opened up with this but I already have plans later today."

"Oh? What are they if you don't mind me asking?"

Despite wearing the same friendly smile I could feel a little bit of pressure behind her words as she was trying to glean some information on me.

'I should be careful with what I say next.'

"I was going to exchange some library books with a friend. They were going to let me borrow the books they checked out."

"Well that shouldn't take too long. You could easily come with me to the café afterwards couldn't you?"

"I usually spend my time with my friend and read books together with them. I'd rather not cancel our plans since we don't meet too often. It'd be pretty cruel to just cancel on them like that out of nowhere."

"Yeah you're right I'd feel pretty bad if I did that to one of my friends too. So who is this mystery friend you have, Ayanokouji-kun? Maybe we could all go to the café together and you two can just sit and read together."

"Sorry they're pretty shy so I don't think that'll work. They're shyer than me if you can believe it. While I'd be uncomfortable with the situation I'd be afraid they'd pass out."

"Is that so? Hm...what is the name of your friend Ayanokouji-kun? Actually you've kept their gender a mystery too. Oh! Don't tell me! Is this a secret girlfriend that you're trying to keep secret! Who is it? Who is it? You gotta tell me!"

Kushida's excitement began to build to a crescendo in front of me as she misinterpreted my carefulness in not revealing my friend's

identity as me trying to hide a significant other.

'How did she even come to that conclusion anyway? Who'd want to date someone like me? Even I can see my flaws with how anti-social I am. The only person I could ask would be Horikita but if I did that I expect either a verbal lashing to last a lifetime that she would somehow manage to condense into 20 minutes or me eating a right hook of hers. Either option seemed just as equally likely.'

Speaking of Horikita, she hadn't left the classroom yet and was still seated at her desk. She seemed to have clearly heard our conversation in its entirety if the scowl on her face was any indication. Or it was because Kushida was still within a 10 foot distance from her.

When I glanced over at Horikita I was met with a piercing stare that was directed at me, and for what reason I couldn't understand.

"Well, aren't you going to answer her Ayanokouji-kun?"

"Oh, did Horikita not know about your girlfriend? Are you two timing her? Did I have an inaccurate impression about you? Are you actually scum of the earth, Ayanokouji-kun?"

"Oi, why are you two suddenly teaming up on me? If you really want to know my friend is a girl but I'd rather not give you two her name since like I said she's shyer than me so she would appreciate her privacy and not have random people poking into her life."

I heaved a sigh and gave a stare at the two girls to get my point across and after a few moments they both backed off but I could see a calculating glint pass over Kushida's eyes while Horikita stared at me with a look that said 'We'll take about this later.'

'Why are these two so interested in my life? Is this what it means to be the harem protagonist I've heard Ike and Yamaguchi talk about? If it is then I want no part of it. I can see why Kushida is interested. But why is Horikita? Is she possibly... jealous? ...Nah there's no way that's possible even if I'm basically her only friend.'

"Are you thinking ill of me Ayanokouji-Kun? It's rather rude to do

such a thing to someone you know."

"What are you? Some kind of, Esper?"

"No but I am rather disappointed that you were thinking poorly of me, Ayanokouji-kun. I don't see what I did to deserve such blatant disrespect."

"I would make a list and present it to you but I think we both have better uses of our time than to sit through a 12 hour long presentation don't you think?"

"Is my presence really such a hardship in your life that you say you could create such an extensive list?"

"Are you denying that if you were to make one on me it wouldn't be of similar length?"

"Oh god no. Mine would at least take 24 hours to get through all its contents."

"Well I would hate to keep my friend waiting so I'll see the two of you another day."

"Farewell Ayanokouji-Kun."

As I began to get my stuff together and exit the classroom only the farewell I received was from Horikita as Kushida began to awkwardly stand where she was in front of mine and Horikita's desk.

As I exited the classroom and began making my trek towards the stairs I was met with a call from behind me.

"Wait, Ayanokouji-kun."

I turned my head back to see Kushida calling after while maneuvering down the hallway towards me in a light jog. While doing so I spotted her 'assets' trying their best to spit in Newton's face.

"Weren't you going to walk with your friend to the café?"

"I told her to go ahead and grab us a table and I'd catch up with her."

"Is that so? So what did you need to talk about? Because I doubt you're trying to convince me to go with you to the café again."

"Actually, I was curious about something. Sorry if I'm about to overstep my boundaries but I really want to know the answer to my question."

I couldn't help but raise an eyebrow and stare questioning at Kushida and wondering what she could possibly want to ask me.

"I know I've already asked a similar question to this before but Ayanokouji-kun... did you know Horikita-san before coming to the school?"

After her words I glanced to the side of me as we continued walking and saw seriousness in her eyes that were piercing through me daring me to lie. Gone was the innocence that usually coated her gaze in place was a serious and professional woman looking at me for the real answer.

"No, when I arrived at this school it's the first time in my life that I'd ever seen Horikita-san. Me and her just happen to be seatmates and so we talk to one another."

"Is that correct? Well you two seem pretty close especially since it's only been the first month into the school year. I mean she's making you lunch. Girls usually don't do that unless it's for their boyfriend you know."

"Does the boyfriend usually pay for his share of the ingredients?"

"No, but that doesn't mean you aren't in your relationship."

I contained a sigh at Kushida's prodding and couldn't help but wonder why Kushida is digging through my relationship with Horikita.

'She asked a similar question the first time we met. This goes way past her wanting to reach her goal of making friends with everyone

in the school as this is bordering on obsession. The fact that she invites me and Horikita out everyday is almost enough to validate that belief alone.'

I once again looked at Kushida and she held the same serious gaze ever since she first asked her question and then I began to get a feel as to why this was so important to her.

"We tolerate each other enough to be in one's company but it doesn't mean there's anything more to it. Besides, how would you feel if I suddenly started saying you and Ike were going out because you're one of if not the only girl he's friends with."

After my words I thought I saw her eyes darken for a moment but before I could confirm what I saw her face broke out into a wide grin with the edges of her eyes crinkling at the edges due to the smile obscuring her eyes.

"Yeah you're right Ayanokouji-kun, I see how it would be annoying and unfair to think you and Horikita-san are dating just because you two interact with one another."

"Well it was nice being able to clear that up Kushida-san. And no hard feelings right?"

Kushida stared at me for a moment, seemingly analyzing me before her smile somehow got even wider when she responded.

"Of course not Ayanokouji-kun! It was nice being able to clear things up and I hope you and your mystery friend enjoy yourselves. I need to leave quickly if I am to catch up with my friends. Ja ne."

"Ja, ne."

After our farewells Kushida began to jog past me and began to make her way to the café.

'Hopefully she doesn't become a problem just because me and Horikita have a good rapport. It would really be bad seeing as how I need to take into account her having almost if not all of the first years as pieces she can move against me.'

"Why can't my school life be simple?"

With a sigh accompanying my apprehension I began making my way to the library with a pep in my step at being able to relax and enjoy reading with a friend.

A/N: This is a little bit of a shorter chapter but I wanted to get this out before I really began to procrastinate/ get writer's block so forgive me for the shorter chapter.

I'm planning on having either the next chapter finally starting the point reveal or the chapter after. Either way we're going to be getting to the school intrigue that we all know and love.

It's going to be interesting trying to think of new plot points seeing as how I don't want to spoil the LN and since I want to expand upon the story of cote so I should probably finally sit down and write an outline of what I want to do instead of spontaneously writing on the spot huh.

Either way the regular update speed *should* be going back to normal but updates will probably be getting more inconsistent this next month.

I only have 4 weeks left of college so more than likely they are going to swamp me with work so I will keep you guys updated on my profile if you want to know how updates are going if I miss a deadline or postpone it.

But after these four weeks I should be uploading consistently

because of summer if I don't end up DMing a D&D campaign like I'm thinkin of doing then updates will most likely stay how they are.

Also I'm thinking of maybe writing an AoT Annie x Eren story because I have an incomplete one I've had on the backburner for 2 years now that I feel like finally getting around to writing. If I do I'll let you guys know how it'll effect the upload schedule of this story

And awhile ago I commented on @AnanoDeprituse 's Ayanokoji X Horikita fic which is one of the first cote stories I ever read and they responded and they said they enjoy my story. It meant the world to me since I'm a fan of their work. If you guys somehow haven't already go read their story and give them support especially since they're one of my main inspirations for writing this story. Without their amazing work this story wouldn't be here right now.

And once again @AnanoDeprituse thank you for the support it means the world to me :).

Anyways thank you everyone once again for reading, commenting, and voting like always your support means the world to me. And when this goes up thank you for the 5K views and 400 votes that this story will inevitably get. And I hope everyone takes care and has a good rest of your day.

Chapter 12

Reads: 2818 | Votes: 120 | Comments: 27

As I began to make my way to the library to meet up with Hiyori-san I noticed something interesting. Despite it being the last week of the month I still saw dozens of students walking with their arms filled with shopping bags.

'Interesting that some people still have money left but I guess spending what you have remaining makes sense since we're supposed to get a new allowance next month.'

Despite this being the case I can't help but as if that's not what's going to happen. From what I've seen with the free commodities scattered throughout the campus along with other clues leads me to believe that there must be something that prevents us from gaining our full allowance.

'While I can hazard a guess as to what the criteria would be I can't be sure until the day where we're supposed to receive our points. Until then I just have to enjoy my student life before that happens.'

As if fate had decided to make itself known by spitting in my face, I promptly bumped into someone once my thoughts came to an end.

"Oh! I'm so sorry I wasn't paying attention to where I was going."

I was met with a girl with Peach Apricot hair with steely blue eyes that reflected a calm warmth in them. The girl in front of me dropped the shopping bag she had in her arms as we bumped into each other and I immediately dropped down to pick up her items while also giving her my apologies.

"No it's my fault I was the one who was spacing out in my own thoughts. I could've avoided bumping into you if I was paying attention."

"H-h-h-hey you don't need to help me pick up my things I can get them myself."

"No, I insist , besides it's partially my fault that you dropped your bag in the first place."

"S-s-seriously just stop. I can do it myself."

Despite the girl's growing protests I continued my work in gathering up her things and putting them into her bag which consisted of many beauty products with some shirts.

Eventually I made my way to the bottom of the pile and my hand froze midway to grabbing for the next item. As I froze I felt a sudden feeling of dread completely cover my back and slowly begin to constrict my throat.

I quickly retracted my hand and stood up as quick as possible and stepped a few steps backwards and gave a 90 degree bow to the girl in front of me and apologized profusely.

"Please accept my heartfelt apologies." After stumbling into you, I was only attempting to put your belongings back together. I had no intention of taking anything or intruding into your business by rummaging through your belongings. I apologize once more and hope you will accept my apologies for my blunder."

From my angle I could see the girl in front of me awkwardly shift her weight from each foot due to not knowing what to do at the current situation.

"I-t-t-t's okay you were just trying to help.... just be sure to listen to someone when they tell you to stop next time. It would cause less situations like this."

"I couldn't agree with you more. It was my mistake and once again I'm really sorry I didn't have any ulterior motives. I was just trying to help."

"Y-y-you're f-f-i-i-ne just stop bowing please you're making me embarrassed."

I rigidly began to straighten my back out in order to face the girl in front of me. Upon doing so I noticed that her face was beet red in embarrassment.

We both stood there in silence not knowing what to say to one another. The awkward atmosphere around the both of us began building until it reached unbearable heights.

"..."

"..."

"..."

"..."

'Christ just say something. I'm going to retract into my body like a turtle in this uncomfortable atmosphere.'

"...ummmmm, my name is Kiyotaka Ayanokouji. It's nice to meet you."

'Yeah because that's how you break the awkward silence after almost picking up her panties. You introduce yourself and give her your name so she can report you to the school. Master level execution at play.'

"My name is Honami Ichinose. It's nice to meet you, Ayanokouji-kun."

"..."

"..."

"..."

"..."

"...Well it was nice meeting you Ichinose-san. I hope next time we meet on better terms."

"You have a good one as well Ayanokouji-kun and ditto."

Despite the situation and the awkwardness from before Ichinose gave me a heartfelt smile before walking past me towards the dorms.

'Well that definitely could've gone better but it also could've gone a lot worse. Small victories, small victories.'

After taking a few breaths and gathering my bearings I set out once again to the library in an attempt to put my latest situation as far from me as possible.

~Break~

After my earlier encounter I was thankfully able to make it to the library with no complications with it being a rather boring journey.

With a bit of resolution and eagerness, I marched up to the library doors and pushed them open.

I quickly scanned my surroundings in the entryway and tried to spot Hiyori sitting at one of the tables.

I looked to the usual table we've occupied together when we read yet I didn't see any sign of her. I then went down a few aisles to find tables situated towards the back of the library and found an unexpected presence.

"Horikita-San?"

"Quite interesting to see you here, Ayanokouji-kun. I didn't take you as the sort to read novels."

"I do enjoy reading. But I'm curious as to why you're here Horikita. Despite me coming here the past few weeks I haven't seen you in the library and I didn't take you as the sort to sit down and read in the library itself. I would've expected you to read in your room."

"I may choose not to associate with people but that doesn't mean I am trying to avoid people like the plague. Do you take me as some kind of shut in?"

"No, but I do take you as someone who wouldn't be in a public

place without any reason."

"I can't read without having to return to my dorm to do so?"

"Well you're able to read where you please. It's just interesting to see you reading here, isn't it?"

"Interesting in what way?"

"Interesting because I can't find my friend who I made plans with to meet here and they haven't notified me about canceling plans and then when I search for them I conveniently find you here instead."

"Are you accusing me of scaring off a friend of yours to spend time with you Ayanokouji-kun? I knew you weren't the sharpest person around but the fact that you're also beginning to become delusional is quite a tragedy."

Despite her protests I saw her left hand stop holding the book earlier in the conversation and to what I would guess begin to nervously grip the edge of her skirt under the desk.

'If you're going to try and lie to me, at least prevent yourself from showing one of your nervous tells. Not like it would matter anyways but this just makes the situation sad.'

"I would appreciate it if you didn't lie to me so brazenly, Horikita-san. Lying so blatantly to me does little in getting you in my good graces. If you apologize now I will forgive you."

I put a tiny amount of force behind my words which seemed to stun Horikita for a moment as her face froze up in a slight sense of shock.

However she quickly schooled her features and it went back to her usual scowl but with a foreign intensity behind it.

"I would appreciate it if you didn't throw these baseless accusations at me. Besides, everything you just said has no evidence behind it and are just baseless accusations."

"Hm, is that so? Then I apologize for wrongly accusing you of

Horikita-san."

After giving my apologies I slowly walked up to the table Horikita was seated at and put my hand on the back of the chair that sat across from Horikita before asking her permission to sit.

She gave me a little hum and then returned her concentration to the book in her hands.

'So the book she's reading this time is Brave New World huh. She has a rather diverse taste in novels.'

I then reached into my bag and pulled out 'All Quiet on the Western Front' and settled into my seat and began to read where I left off.

We both sat and independently read our own books for dozens of minutes before unexpectedly Horikita broke the silence with a question.

"You said you played piano right Ayanokouji-kun."

"Yeah it's one of my favorite hobbies, however I haven't played in a while."

"...Are you able to listen to music and put it down onto sheet music?"

"I can but it takes me a few listens. Why are you asking?"

"..."

I looked up from my book to see Horikita staring at me with a strange intensity in her eyes and not knowing what to say I only raised an inquisitive eyebrow.

"Well...during my childhood me and my family took a trip to the Chiba prefecture and we ended up going to a Jazz Club that was there. They had a pianist go up and perform their song and it was a beautiful song that was enhanced by her talented voice, however no one knew the name of the song that was performed. I've memorized the tune ever since and I've been trying to find it but with no results to show for it."

Horikita then paused and bit her tongue in nervousness before continuing to talk.

"I-i-f I hum the tune do you think y-you could find the song.... Or perform it?"

"You know, that's a pretty big request." Nevertheless, I can try to jot down the notes I hear. There are no guarantees that I will figure out what song it is or that I will be able to accurately record all of the notes right away.

"I appreciate the effort nonetheless, Ayanokouji-kun."

Horikita then turned her head down to her book with a face full of nervousness with no sign of her planning on starting humming.

With a soft sigh I stood up and settled into the seat adjacent to Horikita.

I heard quiet mumbles coming from Horikita but decided not to pry and began taking out a piece of line paper and a pen to start writing down notes that I would catch.

After getting out my materials I returned my attention to my book as Horikita still seemed to be conflicted and was trying to psyche herself up to hum the song.

Her nervous musings continued for a few more minutes and after I finished the page I was on I gave a soft sigh and closed my book before turning to address Horikita.

"You don't have to hum if you don't want to if you're not comfortable doing so."

My words reached her and her face then gained a blush and a look of resolve spread across it before her signature glare framed her face.

"Are you assuming that I am frightened by simply humming? What do you take me for?"

I could only raise an eyebrow in response to her words but decided

against firing back at her.

I turned my attention to the paper in front of me and began to idly move my pen through my fingers waiting for Horikita to start humming.

A few moments passed and I was about to cut my losses and go back to reading my book. Horikita soon began to softly hum beside me.

A soft melody soon began to quietly start beside me with Horikita finally humming the song. I couldn't help but be mesmerized by her soft harmonizing.

I soon began to drown in the soft tone of her voice which is rarely on display and in which I've had the pleasure of hearing a few times. I soon realized that her humming was soon followed by the soft taps of her fingers.

'Must be her remembering the piano arrangement since her fingers are still moving even during her beats of silence while humming.'

I continued to be mesmerized with Horikita's performance with my job completely forgotten while listening to the song that struck a chord with me. I couldn't help but be enthralled by Horikita's performance with me rising slightly on my haunches while listening and feeling a chill run through me.

The tangle of melody that wrapped itself around my ear and bent it to listen in astonishment quickly sent chills up my arms, and I remained entranced by the music at play before me.

Horikita's humming came to an end far too soon, with a small smile on her face as she finished her performance. Her eyes, which had been closed during her performance, slowly opened and made their way to me, gingerly gazing at me, but this soon turned to displeasure when she peered down at the paper in front of me, which had been just as blank as before she began singing.

"So you were lying when you said you could translate the music for me. I expected you to at least have some sort of dignity to you but I

see I was mistaken."

My eyes began to rapidly blink as I realized my mistake and began breaking from the spell that previously captivated me. I soon tried to rectify my mistake and sheepishly responded to Horikita to try and save face.

"...Ah sorry about that, I didn't mean to not write anything... it's just that I was mesmerized by your humming and forgot to translate any of the notes. I'm sorry for not writing anything."

A small blush erupted on her face as she began avoiding my gaze and nervously fiddling with her skirt.

"...I see. Well I suppose I shouldn't be too hard on you for getting captivated by my talents, however I would appreciate you not wasting my time next time Ayanokouji-kun."

I could only nod in response and brought my gaze down to my paper and began softly scratching the edge of the paper with the pen in my hand.

Silence reigned between us with the only sound being the soft ministrations of my pen running across the edge of my paper. Awkward air began to rise between us and I soon brushed it aside with my voice.

"If you don't mind I would like to give it another go and try to translate the music. Also I don't know if you noticed or if it was intentional but you began tapping your fingers to a beat or tune. What is the reason for that?"

"I suppose I could perform one more time... and the finger tapping is from the piano I heard playing. I still remember the tune they played so I could hum the piano harmony another time so we can try and piece this song together."

Horikita then looked up and softly gazed at me with a gentle expression that slightly warmed my person. She then spoke with a gentle smile that left me stunned.

"I hope we can accomplish this together, Ayanokouji-kun. If we do..."

I will be eternally grateful for your efforts."

I was frozen in place for a moment and hesitated with my reply but after a few arduous seconds that felt like minutes I responded.

"It would be my pleasure to help, Horikita-san."

"Just Suzune would be fine, Kiyotaka."

I felt my eyes widen before I calmed down and corrected myself.

"It would be my pleasure to help, Suzune."

Her small smile widened slightly before her face erupted in a blush and she rapidly turned her head from mine and began sputtering to herself.

'What's gotten into her?'

Unknown to me a small and near imperceptible smile unknowingly graced my features while I responded to Suzune.

A/N: SUPRISE! I'm not dead. I really got nothing to say with the lack of uploads other than life catching up with me. Some personal things went on along with having to stress over school and work so motivation to write went down.

I'm sorry for not keeping updates on my page like I said I was going to but was down in the dumps and had no motivation to constantly write updates and deliver false promises on when the next chapter would drop.

I hope you guys enjoyed this chapter. Seeing as how this is a

return chapter I don't expect the quality to be of a similar standard to my previous chapters so I would appreciate feedback on whether this chapter felt too forced or if you feel the pacing of this chapter with the rest of the story fit.

I don't expect similar consistency to come back but I will try to start writing again when I have the time for it so expect chapters to drop when they do until I get back into the groove of writing.

I've also had plans of another story which I plan on working on so that may slow this story down but who knows. I've mainly been writing a loose outline on what I want for that story and working on the first chapter so who knows.

Anyways thank you everyone for your support and for sticking with me this far it means a lot. Thank you for the 7k views and thank you for the 500 favorites when this goes up. Thank you for reading the chapter and I hope everyone takes care and has a good one.

Chapter 13

Reads: 2416 | Votes: 109 | Comments: 7

I couldn't shake the feeling that something wasn't quite right when I awoke today. The fact that I awoke late due to my alarm not going off was proof enough that something bad was going to happen. I went about my morning routine as usual at a quick pace, but I couldn't shake the sense that I was forgetting something important while I was preparing myself.

Eventually, I was able to get myself together with my usual bedhead and slightly wrinkled uniform. My signature slightly crooked tie was also in place, completing my slightly disheveled look.

When I opened the door to my room to start walking to class, a pit in my stomach formed as I realized that today was going to be a disaster.

"Hey, Ayanokouji-kun, would you mind if we could walk to class together?"

I was met with the cheerful visage of Kushida and as soon began weighing the pros and cons of just shutting the door in her face and hiding myself in my room for the rest of the day.

I realized that the cons would be too great, which was mainly in the form of getting an earful from Horikita for purposely missing class. I heaved a sigh to gather my strength and answered Kushida.

"Sure, I don't mind."

"Oh, thank you, Ayanokouji-kun. I promise not to be a bother."

'Don't worry, you are a bother, so you don't have to worry about being one or not. Also, how long has she been waiting here for me? I hope she wasn't out here for too long, or else some unsavory

rumors are going to spread. '

After agreeing to Kushida's invitation, a smile broke out across her face that had enough warmth behind it to light up the hallway. Despite this, I felt nothing from her angelic smile.

I then exited my room, while locking the door behind me. I began making my way to the elevator with Kushida by my side. Despite her invitation and eagerness to walk to school with me, we continued on in silence until we made it to the elevator.

We waited quietly a few steps away from the elevator doors, patiently watching the elevator descend to our floor. I noticed Kushida was trying to figure out what to say out of the corner of my eye. With a small expression of concentration creeping across her features, she appeared troubled. Her eyes grew sharp and steely, then vanished as her customary smile framed her face.

Right after her smile graced her features once more, she turned towards me and began to address me.

"Ayanokou-"

Thankfully, I was saved by the opening of the elevator and began to walk into the elevator before the doors even finished opening. However, this nearly led to disaster as I almost ran into someone.

"Do you have functioning eyes in that skull of yours or was your plan to bulldoze me with your idiocy?"

Greeting me was none other than Horikita, who was leveling a glare at me with her ever-present scowl. I gave her a quiet apology and awkwardly moved around her to stand on the other side of the elevator.

"Oh, wow, you're also running late, Horikita-san? I wouldn't have expected that from you."

Horikita briefly looked my way and shot me a look of anger, which then shifted to one of disgust and contempt, before turning towards Kushida.

'Oi, it's not like I had her in my room. It's not my fault that she knew where my dorm room was located and waited for me. Actually, how does she know where my room is?'

"I don't see how the time of my arrival to class is of any concern to you. Also, I'm rather curious; what were you doing on the level of the boys' dorms?"

As Horikita was addressing her, Kushida stepped through the divider and stood in the middle of the elevator in between me and Horikita, which prompted another look of venom directed towards me originating from Horikita.

'It's not like I told her to stand there. Do you expect me to have her on a leash?'

Kushida gave Horikita a puzzled look, which then morphed into one of embarrassment and compassion.

"Oh, I wasn't spending the night with Ayanokouji-kun or anything! I woke up late and wanted to walk to school with someone, so I waited outside his dorm for him so we could walk together. Sorry if you think I'm trying to steal him away from you. It's totally not like that. Besides, Ayanokouji-kun is too bland of a person for me."

Her explanation was then followed by a cute giggle that was diminished in my eyes as it was preceded by insulting me. Horikita seemed to find equal displeasure in Kushida's words as I did, as the previous venom in her eyes seemed to overtake them as she was now openly glaring at Kushida with hostility.

"I would appreciate it if you would not make false remarks regarding mine and Ayanokouji-kun's relationship. I'd prefer not to have to deal with unfounded suspicions regarding my name. I hope you can find a way to prevent those loose lips of yours from getting caught up in your web of 'friendship.'"

Horikita punctuated her statement by spitting out the word "friendship" with as much contempt as she could muster while maintaining her composed demeanor.

Kushida was visibly taken aback by Horikita's venomous words as she took a slight step back in response.

As Kushida was still reeling from Horikita's words, the elevator door opened, which was followed by Horikita's swift exit. I only hesitated for a moment to spare Kushida a glance. I was rewarded by seeing Kushida with a strained smile on her face and eyes that seemed to stare out into nothing.

After taking in her appearance, I also exited the elevator and began following Horikita, leaving Kushida behind on her own.

As I was making my way through the lobby, I couldn't help but feel slightly unsettled. Despite seeing others also leaving the dorms late, I couldn't help but feel a heavy atmosphere forming. Everyone seemed to act normally, with no indication of anything bad happening, so I just filed my concerns away for later.

I couldn't help but think back on Kushida's condition as I dropped into step beside Horikita.

'Why did she freeze up like that? Horikita has said worse to her and has spat words just as hurtful, so what made this time different? It couldn't have been with how she denied the implied relationship between us so the only other thing it could have been wa-'

"Why do you continue to entertain her, Ayanokouji-kun? You always seem to go along with her requests, no matter the situation."

"It's just that I like avoiding trouble, so I just go along with what she wants since it'd be less stressful overall. Besides, doesn't she constantly badger you every day, multiple times a day? It must be exhausting, so to avoid that fate, I simply say yes and go about my day afterwards."

"So you'd rather waste part of your day by entertaining her and submitting yourself to her whims despite you having no obligation to do so? Sometimes you are a rather pitiful existence, Ayanokouji-kun."

"How about yourself? Is it because of your pride and conviction in

disregarding Kushida, for whatever reason, that you stymie any of her attempts at even basic conversation?"

"While I applaud you for being correct in your assumption of my actions being a matter of conviction, I have no intention of making any friends, which is in direct opposition to her goals, so I have to attack the problem at the root and I hope it doesn't sprout up again. I also abhor having to deal with individuals who hide behind false pretenses."

"Oh? What makes you say that?"

"I would have expected you to realize it sooner, Ayanokouji-kun. Especially with how close you two seem to be, but I suppose I gave you too much credit since you still associate with her. Forget I said anything, Ayanokouji-kun. I wouldn't want to be the person to ruin your image of Kushida."

Despite the seemingly kind gesture, her last sentence was filled with such a heavy layer of sarcasm that I could cut it with a knife.

I began staring at Horikita out of the corner of my eye while we continued to walk and contemplated whether I should tell her of my uneasiness around Kushida.

'While I've realized that Kushida seems to be putting on airs, should I reveal my knowledge to Horikita? Would it be more or less troublesome? On one hand we would have common ground in our mistrust of Kushida and she would stop badgering me whenever Kushida interacts with me. On the other hand, I would reveal that I'm capable of seeing through her facade, something which very few people have managed to do if her long list of friends is anything to go by. '

Instead of answering her, I continued to walk beside Horikita in silence and, after a few moments, she gave a scoff, accepting my silence as my answer.

As we continued on our trek to our classroom, I couldn't help but feel a tenseness in the air as we approached the classroom building. I could see upperclassmen walking around with sullen expressions

on their faces and others with faces of superiority and pride.

I looked over to Horikita to see if she also noticed the atmosphere and our upperclassmen's conditions, but she seemed too focused on making her way to class.

With a sigh, I continued walking with Horikita as we began making our way to the classroom as the pit in my stomach from earlier came back with a vengeance that was now clawing at my insides, making it shift in discomfort.

Thankfully, we made our way to the classroom unbothered, but as we approached our classroom, I could hear noises of concern and indignation as we got closer and closer.

I shared a quick look with Horikita as we both stood outside the classroom as the protests from within grew louder and more indignant. I could see a faint look of concern and confusion pass over Horikita's face as our usual carefree class seemed to have found an issue with something.

With how easy school life has been and the carefree attitude our class as a whole has kept, clearly something terrible must have occurred. I once more glanced over at Horikita, who now wore a slightly stressed expression as she had also come to the same conclusion that I have.

As I was about to prepare myself with a sigh and open the door, Horikita beat me to the punch and heaved a sigh of her own and placed a hand on the door. I could see her hand shaking ever so slightly on the door handle and decided it was best to try and calm her down.

"You know, I have the legal right to sue you for infringing and stealing my rights, as you did just now. Mentally preparing yourself and then sighing afterwards before proceeding with what you're going to do is a clear copy of my caricature. I expect just compensation for your intolerable actions."

"What are you, a child? Also if that's the best you can manage at a joke I suggest you look up material online or in a book, Kiyotaka.

That, among many other fields, is clearly something you need to work on."

"But I gave it my best shot, so I think it should count for something, Suzune."

"I suppose, but don't expect me to congratulate you because that would be insincere praise, and if you take that as a compliment, you're much more flawed than I thought you were initially."

"Rather harsh, don't you think? I would at least enjoy some sort of recognition for my efforts."

"Let's just enter the classroom already and see what these apes are screaming over."

Thanks to the conversation, her previously shaking hand has stopped and is now held out firm with confidence that was previously unfounded.

'And the small smile that now graces her beautiful features? That'll be considered my remuneration for assisting her in relaxing.'

Little did I know, as the classroom door began opening, this would be the beginning of the end of the peaceful school life I wished for and envisioned.

A/N: Sorry for the rather short chapter but I hope you guys enjoyed it regardless. And once again I hope the quality of this chapter holds up to earlier chapters as I feel as if there may have been a dip in quality due to how long it's been since the last chapter and if that is the case I sincerely apologize.

Anyways I just want to thank each and every one of you profusely for reading and supporting my story. Shortly before posting this chapter this story hit 600 votes and is soon to reach 10k views.

I can't thank you guys enough and never would've thought my slow burn story of Horikita and Ayanokouji would've gotten to this point especially since this ship doesn't have that many stories attached to it, so I am extremely surprised there's been this much interest.

I have had other stories in the past gain a good amount of traction but not to this extent. I've come to realize that I just enjoy writing this story and adore writing the dialogue between the characters and seek to innovate and keep the story fresh. The challenge of keeping the characters in character but finding ways to explore them and have them grow differently is extremely fun and rewarding when I feel like I do it right.

Anyways enough rambling from me but once again I can't thank all of you guys enough for all your support.

I will look to update more frequently but that spark for writing hasn't come back completely but I can feel it coming back however faint it is at the moment. So while no promises to having consistent chapters again I will try my best to deliver.

Once again thank you so much for the support it means the absolute world to me and for those you comment it means a lot and gives me the energy to keep coming back. Knowing that I'm not screaming into a void and having people comment on or discuss my work means so much.

Anyways I'll finally wrap this up. Thank you everyone for reading this chapter and supporting me up to this point and hope you continue to do so in the future. Take care everyone and I hope you have a wonderful rest of your day.

Chapter 14

Reads: 2489 | Votes: 95 | Comments: 10

As Horikita and I entered our classroom, we went unobserved by the rest of the class, who were engulfed in turmoil and conversing in a panicked manner.

We slid into our seats swiftly and exchanged looks before turning to face our classmates. After a moment of observation, Horikita sighed slightly before reaching into her bag and pulling out a book titled "Iphigenia," turning to a page, and beginning to read.

'The Iliad's prequel? She has an unusual taste in literature. I suppose I should listen in and attempt to figure out what's going on because she appears satisfied to ignore the rest of the class.'

Heaving my signature sigh I strained my ears and began focusing in on a conversation to listen in on and focused in on the conversation between Yamauchi and Ike. Finding a conversation to zero in on I then began observing the two of them out of the corner of my eye.

I spotted Ike exasperatedly rub his hair in stress while addressing Yamauchi with his concerns.

"I can't believe this! How can the school mess up something so important! Like seriously this is our livelihoods being messed up! How is this fair! If the other classes don't have to deal with this then we deserve some serious compensation for this!

"You'd think this would be one of the last things to happen, given how rich the school is and how much stuff we have on campus. I can see an elevator not working or something. But, us not receiving our points since their system messed up is something I would've never thought."

"Tell me about it! I was planning on buying some more games for

my Vita but how am I supposed to do that when I'm not going to get my points for who knows how long."

'Ah so that's what all the complaints are about. Our class seems to have not received our points.'

The previous pit in my gut came back with a vengeance as the uneasiness I felt since this morning began to reach its zenith.

To validate what I heard was correct I fished my phone out of my pocket and went to find my point balance. Upon opening the required app my point balance was the same as when I split the latest ingredients I purchased with Horikita.

I couldn't help but feel bitter at the predicament me and the rest of my class now found ourselves in. I looked over towards Horikita who seemed to have heard the same that I did if the slightly shocked expression and shaking of the book in her hands was anything to go by.

"Seriously this is totally ridiculous! How are we supposed to have fun if we don't receive our points this is seriously stupid."

"Hey, relax." Perhaps the school made a mistake, Karuizawa-san. Instead of receiving the points first thing in the morning, we might get them after our final class."

At the front of class the named Karuizawa shouted out her frustration which seemed to rally a lot of the girls behind her which raised the already chaotic nature of the class to a fervor.

As the class continued their protests I looked back towards Horikita and addressed her with my voice barely carrying over the disorder and chaos of the class.

"Do you think the other classes are experiencing a similar situation to us?"

My words seemed to shock Horikita out of the trance she was currently in and she took a moment to regain her composure before addressing me.

"I have no idea. I would assume this would be a school wide problem but until we ask the other classes we are going to have to assume this is strictly a class D problem."

"Are you saying that since we're class D that could be the reason that we haven't received our points."

"Besides an error in the system of the school that is the only proper conclusion I can come to but for what reason we are subjected to not receiving our points eludes me."

I couldn't help but frown in response to her answer as she seemed to have not figured out the true meaning behind not obtaining our points. I toyed with the idea of telling her my suspicions but decided on trying to lead her to the answer as I feel that she could find the answer herself if I gave her enough crumbs.

'But would it be disconcerting if I just told her the solution if she didn't understand the indications the school offered us? Would it really be so horrible if she had acquired the information from a friend? Using your connections would be a nice thing for her to learn, but I'd be handing her the solution rather than her asking and figuring it out herself.

Why am I so conflicted about this issue? Horikita can improve herself without my guiding her every step of the way, but a part of me wants to assist her as much as possible. Would I do the same thing for the other students in my class? Probably not, but I haven't spent as much time with any of them as I have with Horikita, so I'm not as invested in them. But, I did help Kushida one time and gave her a hint, yet I don't feel like helping her as much as I would help Horikita.'

Before I could think any further the door towards the front of the classroom slammed open and effectively silenced the classroom.

"Take your seats. Morning homeroom will now begin."

As she strolled into the classroom with the ringing taps of her heels, Chabashira-sensei's monotonous and frigid voice resonated across the classroom, mesmerizing everyone.

No one said anything as she made her way to the podium, and the room took on an oppressive atmosphere. I belatedly recognized the rolled up piece of paper she was carrying in one of her hands.

After an agonizing period of time, Sensei finally made her way to the podium, where she looked at the classroom as if we were vermin beneath her with contempt in her eyes and smirk of superiority.

"H-h-hey sensei do you k-know why we didn't receive our p-points. I thought w-we would get them today s-since it's the first of the m-month."

Ike was the first person bold enough to confront sensei after a few seconds of stillness when sensei arrived at the podium and placed the rolled up piece of paper down with a slam. Everyone was concentrating on finding the solution to his query and secretly appreciating his bravery for speaking despite his considerable stammer.

Sensei's smirk then turned downright predatory as she addressed us with a mocking tone of voice.

"This month's months have been correctly allotted. I can confidently say this class hasn't been overlooked and that the points have been correctly allotted for ALL classes."

The emphasis sensei put on all made the atmosphere in the classroom shift and out of the corner of my eye I saw Horikita give a gulp as she seemed to realize what was in store for us.

"You're all a bunch of idiots. I can't believe you're all so defective that you've been left in this pitiful state that you will have no escape from."

A combined total of 98 tardies and absences 391 instances of talking and cell phone usage in class. It's been quite a month of ineptitude from you all. I'm blown away by the amount of incompetence at work. Your grades and performance assessments are represented in the points you are granted at this institution.

My evaluation of you resulted in you losing all 100,000 points you were due. For this month, you will receive zero points. Exactly in line with the horrible manner in which you have all conducted yourselves. So, why should incompetence be rewarded? You will be given exactly what you deserve. Nothing."

Horikita seemed to be trying her hardest to jot down what Chabashira-sensei was saying, if the sound of pencil scratching against paper was anything to go by. If the haphazard method she was writing was any indication, she was taking notes while analyzing her words when I took a brief look at her page.

'Her work ethic is extremely impressive especially considering the circumstances, I'm rather impressed with her level of initiative.'

Did you truly believe that high school kids would be granted 100,000 yen each month to spend with no strings attached? That's ridiculous. Apply common sense. Why did you do nothing about your doubts if you had them?

As she said this, Chabashira-sensei gave me a pointed look that seemed to go unnoticed by the rest of the class.

"Didn't I tell you on the first day?" This school evaluates students on their own merits. That implies you're all worthless. You're trash. The lowest of the low."

Chabashira-sensei then grabbed a marker from under the podium and began writing on the board that read:

Point List for First-Year Classes

Class A: 940cp

Class B: 650cp

Class C: 490cp

Class D: 0cp

"This is the S-System. It evaluates students in real time and assigns numerical numbers to them. Look. You, Class D, have demonstrated

admirably that you deserve to be ranked last. That you're the worst type of defective."

Beside me Horikita let loose a small tsk of annoyance while she grit her hands and teeth while having a pained expression on her face.

"That must have cut real deep, especially with superior she views herself in comparison to others. For all the time that I've known her I'm the only person she's given any sort of respect and recognition to.'

Clapping quickly echoed across the room as sensei glanced at us with a condescending sneer, clearly pleased by our predicament.

"However, I must also offer you flowers in celebration. You accomplished something that has never been done before in the history of our school. In the first month, you lost all of your points and ended up with zero class points. Rejoice! Even if you are left with nothing, you will be remembered as the worst type of rubbish to ever travel through this school."

"Sensei, at least tell us the criteria for how points are gained and lost."

At the front of the classroom the resident ikemen Hirata stood up in his chair and bravely addressed Chabashira-sensei with a resolved expression on his face.

"I'm not at liberty to reveal such information. Besides, I think me telling you of your tardies and classroom interruptions was enough information. Besides in real life the only time your evaluation is revealed to you is when you do exceptionally well or heinously terrible.

These points on the board are the class points for each class. For each class point, 100 privat points are assigned to each student in the class. When you first arrived here each class had 1,000 class points. So in other words you incompetet lot lost them all."

"Um. Will we have a chance to obtain more class points?"

The next person to speak up was Kushida who wore a worried

expression on her face that only served to lower the morale of the class further seeing the class mascot concerned in such a way.

"You will. And if, as a result you earn more points than Class C, you'll be promoted to C, while Class C will be demoted to D. Your soonest opportunity will be the upcoming midterms. Depending on your scores, we may be granted as many as 100 class points."

'Interesting that despite the situation and the way she has deepened us she includes herself in the class when we gain points. Despite the circumstance she also has a stake in our class. Yet she seems resigned to being saddled with Class D and expecting our level of failure.'

"However, these are the results of the latest of the most recent quizzes. And what garbage these scores are! Next time anyone who relieves a failing score on their midterms or finals will be immediately expelled."

She then drew a line on the paper containing our test scores leaving a third of the class below the line.

"All of you below this line pay attention. If this test was the midterm, all of you would be expelled. So use this as your motivation to better yourself and prevent that fate."

Chabarisensei then began walking to the door with the echoing of her heels once more echoing throughout the classroom. As she was about to leave the classroom she threw us one last glance over her shoulder before leaving us with her parting words.

"You are all the worst of the worst. I have no expectation that any of you will do well. But maybe if you struggle with all your might maybe you'll be able to claw your way out of this hole you've all dug yourself.

Sensei then let loose a cruel laugh and one last jab before shutting the door behind her just as hard as when she entered.

"Do give me some form of entertainment. I do enjoy seeing insects struggle against the inevitable."

A/N: I definitely should've held off on my last chapter and just melded that one and this one together but hey what can you do. I mainly wanted to get that chapter out since it was awhile since i last updated.

Sorry for this one also being pretty short but I hope it's made up with this one coming out pretty quick. I'll try and get a better, more detailed, and longer chapter out next time.

If I don't release a new chapter next I may just go back and rewrite this chapter and the previous chapter. Lately I have been dealing with some pretty bad headaches so if there has been a dip in quality or inconsistency in how I write the characters I apologize.

Due to this when my headaches subside I may go back and rewrite these when I'm in a better state of mind and if I'm not happy with the quality of these chapters.

My father had to deal with migraines throughout his life so hopefully it's not that and I just have a head cold.

Anyways thank you everyone for the support and I hope you enjoy this chapter and I hope everyone takes care and has a good rest of their day.

Chapter 15

Reads: 2636 | Votes: 90 | Comments: 11

I was currently drowning in a sea of sound that echoed all around me. My senses became slightly foggy as a result of this, since I could barely hear myself think. This was owing to the fact that I was now sitting in the school cafeteria instead of my classroom for lunch.

'And why the change of scenery, you may wonder? Horikita thought it essential for us to leave the classroom since many students chose to remain in class today to discuss ways to get points and form study groups to assist others avoid failing.

In actuality?'

"Despite the fact that it is more important than ever to form bonds with our fellow students and interact with them, why have you decided to take me to the cafeteria with you so you can dump some plans on me instead?"

"For someone who earned a 50 on the last quiz we did in class, that was rather observant and rational. Even a prat like you, it appears, can have a stroke of genius once in a blue moon."

Despite her leveling accusations at me with her antagonistic words, I couldn't help but focus on a peculiar word she threw at me.

"Prat? I didn't know you were one to curse, Horikita-san. I would've assumed you were too sophisticated for that kind of language. While I do respect the lengths you went to in order to not say the other word, the intention remains."

Horikita's face then lit up with embarrassment and a mix of anger, if the glare she was leveling at me was anything to go by.

"Who knew the maiden-like Horikita was one to use vulgar and crude language? It's a rather disorienting sight to see such language

used by a refined woman such as yourself. Your branding is all over the place."

As I prodded her more, her face flushed, the blush now totally covering her face. She was also now sporting a barely discernible pout on her lips. Her ears were likewise crimson and appeared to be on the verge of producing steam at any minute.

She continued to scowl at me, but it lacked the venom and efficiency it usually had, especially given how out of place I left her with my joking. While I was taking in her reactions, I couldn't help but think of one thing while I was staring at her.

'Cute.'

As I was taking in her embarrassed demeanor, I soon recognized her struggling to form words due to her embarrassment. As she was trying to force words out, they were left twitching at the corners of her mouth, never to see the light of day.

Eventually, she was able to gather herself enough to respond to me.

"You're i-i-nsufferable, you know t-t-that. I don't know why I put up with you at times."

"Because you enjoy my company and would fee-"

I was swiftly cut off by a fierce Horikita, yanking my tie to bring me eye level with her, which also had the consequence of bringing me centimeters from her face.

"If you continue that sentence, I will see to it that you will be unable to speak such nonsense again."

A response had already filled my mind and was ready to be thrown back into her face, but the words died on the tip of my tongue as a brazen idea popped into my head a picosecond later, which I quickly gravitated to.

As my response to her sudden aggression, I gave a small puff of my breath, which faintly struck her nose.

Horikita then burst into a shade of red I've never seen on her face, with me feeling the heat radiating from her face despite me not being in contact with her directly.

Also, due to my proximity, I heard her quietly begin to sputter as her mental facilities began to slow and shut down. While this happened, I felt the hand on my tie slacken, which eventually led to her hand limply falling to her side.

Taking this as a win, I withdrew my face from hers and focused my attention on the meal in front of me and began eating with vigor.

As I ate my meal in silence, Horikita remained frozen beside me, still in the same position that she was in earlier. Releasing a sigh at my actions due to going overboard, I decided to help her and bring her back to earth.

"Eiiiiiii!"

A brief squeal erupted from Horikita as she reacted to my pinching of her side, which seemed to do the trick in bringing her back to her senses, if the embarrassed glare she was leveling at me while retreating a few spaces away from me was any indication.

"I-i-i s-s-ee you h-h-have returned to your p-p-pervverted ways."

"You know, the intended bite those words were supposed to have is vastly diminished by your meek behavior and cute stuttering."

Horikita looked ready to once again verbally spar but paused a moment to reconsider before settling in a few spaces away from me and reluctantly began digging into her meal.

Despite the atmosphere becoming clamer around us, there was still a slight layer of tension that settled between us, with Horikita still sporting a slight blush on her face.

Surprisingly, we both finished our meals with no interruptions coming from either one of us or another individual, which thankfully left me to eat in peace. However, my peace was short-lived as Horikita addressed me while still sporting a slight blush on her face that was nearly imperceptible.

"Ayanokouji-kun, may I ask you for a favor?"

One of my eyebrows couldn't help but shoot up in disbelief at Horikita's words, as her asking for any kind of help, let alone a favor, is something extremely out of character for her.

'It must be something fairly important if she is willing to indebted herself to me to do something. Especially since she could easily leverage her constantly making me food despite me helping pay for my half of the ingredients.'

"Depends, what's the favor in question?"

Horikita shot me a glare through her blush and held the gaze for a moment before taking a deep sigh and then explaining what she needed from me.

"Earlier, before we left the classroom, you saw how Hirata-kun and the others were trying to work out a plan of action?"

She looked towards me to see if I was following along and gave a brief nod in acknowledgement, which seemed to satisfy her as she continued.

"They're trying to form a study group and while I don't doubt his capabilities to bring the class together, I have doubts about him even getting together with certain individuals."

"The idiot trio?"

Horikita gave me a brief glance out of the corner of her eye, analyzing me and seemingly filing my reaction away for later, before giving her confirmation and continuing.

"Yes, them. They seem like the types to refuse to join due to either hotheadedness in the form of Sudo or a dislike of Hirata in the case of the other two."

I couldn't help but nod in agreement while giving my thoughts on the matter.

"Yeah, they didn't really look like they would be the studious kind."

"I personally can't imagine how someone could fail a test. But the fact remains that there are hopeless students out there in our class, for whom failure is nearly inevitable."

"That's pretty harsh of you."

"Not necessarily. I'm stating the truth, that's all. If nothing changes, it's extremely likely that they'll fail. And if we want our class to be promoted, it's vital that we not only avoid losing points but that we also gain them. Right? Do you think otherwise?"

"Not necessarily. While they may be hopeless at the moment they can easily pursue to better themselves and improve on their scores."

"Then what I'm going to propose to you should be of interest to you since your ideology lines up with what I'm going to ask of you."

Her foreboding words left a small pit to form in my stomach as I couldn't help but feel as if my doom was fast approaching.

"I want to hold a study group, and I want you to participate in it and help gather the others."

"Despite my having some kind of rapport with them, I highly doubt it's enough to invite them to a study group. Especially one with you in it when you've done nothing but look down on people and be abrasive all year."

Despite my harsh words, I received no backlash, with Horikita seemingly taking my words in stride. Only if one was to ignore the twitching of the corner of her eye at my words.

That is why I'm asking you, Ayanokouji-kun. I've realized that if I were to confront them, my chances of success would be close to zero. Meanwhile, if you did it, your chances would also be close to zero, but you would have better odds than if I tried.

"You're praising me, yet I can't help but feel saddened at your words, Horikita-san."

Horikita let loose a deep, lung-emptying sigh that finally removed the blush that had been dancing at the edges of her cheeks this

entire time. Horikita then looked me straight in the eyes, missing the usual coldness that colored them, which was instead replaced with a slight amount of earnestness that painted her eyes in a vibrant light.

"Can you please at least try Ayanokouji-kun? If you can do this, then I will not try to involve you heavily in the study group and you will obtain a favor from me that you can use later on. I'm still aiming for Class A and I'd rather not have it derailed from the jump due to three idiots not applying themselves when it mattered the most and instead selfishly dragging the class down with them."

'A little late for that, don't you think?'

Despite my inner thoughts, I couldn't help but digest the earnestness in her voice during her request and get lost in the resolute look in her eyes as she laid her request bare to me.

I took a moment to think over her request and was on the verge of denying her before I once again caught her eye, which now held the tiniest hint of desperation and hope, and then realized my fate was sealed. I let out a soul- emptying sigh before giving her my answer.

"I'll help you, but don't expect me to succeed."

After my agreement, a small smile blossomed on Horikita's face, which froze me in my seat at the beautiful sight. The corners of her lips were slightly quirked up at each end, with a hint of her dimples straining her cheeks.

"Thank you, Kiyotaka."

As if she wasn't done tormenting me enough, she then thanked me while using my given name. I was frozen for a few moments, trying to comprehend where this warmth was hidden within Horikita and why it was brought out in my presence.

I was also trying to process why she felt such fondness for me for agreeing to her demands. But most importantly, there was a question stirring within me that I needed answered.

'Why is there such warmth in my chest? How was Horikita able to

affect me like this? I haven't felt this type of warmth in me since..."

Stopping my thoughts from further spiralling, I brought my attention back towards the smiling girl in front of me and finally formed a response.

"No problem, Suzune. I hope you can come to me again if you need a favor or anything else."

'Why did I say that? Why did I just invite her to drag me into more troublesome trouble? I had no reason to do such a thing, let alone go out of my way to suggest such an arrangement.'

The slightly expanding smile and blush of the girl in front of me appeared to be the answer to my query, as my heart began to race with heat immediately radiating on the back of my neck, which I had to keep myself from automatically rubbing.

"Oh, Ayanokouji-kun. It's interesting to see you here since I've never seen you in the cafeteria before. "

As the earlier warming atmosphere was swiftly stripped away by a third party who unwittingly decided to ruin the moment with their arrival, a chill then descended between me and Horikita at the loss of the previous warmth held between us.

I turned to the newcomer and, while happy to see the latest arrival, couldn't help but feel a small amount of resentment at her arrival.

"Hey there, Shinya-san. I usually eat inside my classroom, so that's probably why you haven't seen me in the cafeteria until now."

"It is rather peculiar to see you somewhere other than the library."

Hiyori then did a slight double take as she finally noticed Horikita seated beside me and greeted her.

"Ah, good to see you again. Horikita-san I see that you're having lunch with Ayanokouji-kun. I hope that I'm not interrupting."

"No worries. We were just finishing up a conversation, so no need to think you interrupted us. I didn't know that you and Horikita-san

were acquaintances. How did that come about?"

At my invitation, I could feel Horikita stiffen beside me. I began focusing on her out of the corner of my eye and found her shifting in her seat while her eyes began wandering, never once landing on me or Shinya for more than a moment.

"Well I met her whe-"

"Oi, Shinya, lunch is about to end, so get to class. I've got something I need to discuss with the rest of the class before lunch is over."

A familiar voice rang out, and I looked behind Shinya to find Ryuen advancing towards us with a bored expression sitting on his face, with a large student following closely behind. The student in question was an obvious foreigner and looked to be large enough to be a professional American football player.

"Oh, what's this? Something interesting seems to have been placed in front of me, kukuku."

Openly recognizing who Shinya was conversing with, a sadistic smile soon blossomed on Ryuen's face, which served to squander any happiness I had remaining and was soon filled with trepidation and anger.

Ryuen's eyes glazed over me, giving me a sparse glance, seemingly taking in my appearance before his eyes settled in on Horikita with a twisted glint in his eye.

"I didn't expect to see you again so soon. You couldn't get enough of me, I see."

"The rest of my life would be too soon to see you again. It's truly unfortunate that I even have to be within a few meters of you and your foul stench."

"You've been taking a whiff of me, have you? I wouldn't mind taking you back to my room to show you the kind of cologne I wear. If you want some, I'm sure I can find some ways to share it with you."

After his words, I felt my hands clench under the table as his tongue began gliding over his lips in a serpentine like manner.

"I'll be on my way to the class, Ryuen-kun. I've already finished up my lunch anyway. Also, have you gotten in contact with Ibuki-san yet? If you don't go after her, I know I'm sure she'll take the chance to miss the meeting."

An unexpected savior appeared in Shinya as she began conversing with Ryuen while steering his focus away from Horikita.

"You're right. I still haven't contacted her yet."

A scowl soon blossomed on Ryuen's face and he began openly glaring down at Shinya, who in turn continued to hold his gaze with no sign of nervousness or fear as her usual reserved expression and demeanor were kept intact.

'Does she not fear Ryuen? I would expect someone as reserved and meek as her to cower under him right away, but she seems to find his actions... amusing?'

A glint of amusement and playfulness I hadn't seen before was in Shinya's eyes as she matched Ryuen's glare with a steady gaze of her own.

Ryuen then spared me and Horikita a glance, taking in Horikita's appearance, which made me feel Horikita shiver ever so slightly beside me, which seemed to somehow go unnoticed by Ryuen.

Ryuen then turned his gaze to me and began taking in and examining me for the first time in earnest, seemingly committing my appearance to memory while trying to get a read on me. He then turned towards the student who was accompanying him before turning away and walking towards the exit of the cafeteria.

"Let's go, Albert. We need to find Ibuki and make sure she shows up to class."

" *You got it, boss.* "

My eyes widened slightly as the now named Albert responded in

perfect English instead of Japanese and began following Ryuen out of the cafeteria, casting a shadow over Ryuen due to the difference in size. Despite this, it only served to give Ryuen a more intimidating aura, as the presence of Albert only seemed to compliment him instead of diminish his aura.

As the three of us watched the two make their exit from the cafeteria, I turned to Shinya and apologized.

"Sorry if you have a harder time in class because you decided to cover for us, Shinya-san. Ryuen doesn't seem like the type to let things like that go, so I hope nothing happens to you."

"Oh, don't worry about me, Ayanokouji-kun. If anything, I'm sorry for bringing his attention to the two of you. I'm also sorry for the short meeting, but I hope to see you in the library sometime soon, Ayanokouji-kun. I hope the two of you have a good rest of your day in class, especially after what transpired with your class."

With that, Shinya gave me a quick bow before briskly walking after Ryuen towards the exit of the cafeteria, seemingly following him in his search for Ibuki.

Then it was just me and Horikita left alone once again, and I could not feel more relieved as the tension from earlier due to Ryuen's entrance finally started to leave my body.

I began preparing to address Horikita, but as I opened my mouth, the bell signaling the five minute warning to get to class before the next period started rang throughout the cafeteria.

What I was getting to say was then replaced with me asking her if she was ready to go, to which she responded with her agreement in a reserved manner that served to have my fists clench ever so slightly.

We then began making our way back to class with an objective now placed on my shoulders and a plan to improve our classmates began brewing in Horikita.

A/N: So another chapter after so long. Sorry for the slow

chapters, but I'm glad I got this one out.

Also, you've probably already noticed, but, WE HAVE A NEW COVER IMAGE!!!

I would like to thank a friend of mine who I commissioned and want to thank her for the hard work and the beautiful art. I didn't give her any directions on what I wanted, mainly that I wanted Horikita and Ayanokouji. But the pout she gave Horikita?

Perfect.

I couldn't have asked for anything better. As soon as I saw the unfinished sketch and I saw her pout, I knew it was an amazing decision to commission her.

I will leave a link to the artwork below and a link to my friend's Instagram page. Please go check her out because she has amazing art and is accepting commissions at the moment. So if you guys also want your own COTE art or anything else, be sure to commission her because it's worth it.

Anyways, thank you for waiting on this chapter and giving me your opinions on it and if I wrote the characters properly. I hope everyone takes care and has a good rest of their day.

<https://www.instagram.com/aubwei/>

<https://imgur.com/gallery/plzTPj6>



Chapter 16

Reads: 2643 | Votes: 77 | Comments: 7

"Nah."

"I can't make it."

"What are you trying to say!?"

'Well, that could've gone better.'

After classes and approaching each member of the idiot trio in the form of Ike, Yamauchi, and Sudo, I was met with rejection, with my attempt at recruiting Sudo nearly leading to him choking me with my own tie.

After my failed attempts, I went back to my room in order to gather my thoughts and move on with plan B.

"The question is, do I ask for forgiveness now or later?"

I spent some time contemplating the possible outcomes while I perched on the side of my bed. After considerable consideration, I eventually chose my response, took a moment to breathe, then dialed the front desk from the telephone in my room.

"Excuse me, but can you put me through to Horikita Suzune?"

"Just give me a moment, young man."

The familiar sound of ringing soon greeted me as I waited for Horikita to answer her phone and hedged my bets that she was currently residing in her room. For a few more seconds, the phone kept ringing, and as it did, my hope began to wane. Thankfully, before my hopes were dashed, Horikita finally picked up the other end of the phone.

"What is it, Ayanokouji-kun? Did you successfully convince those simpletons to better themselves and accept my help?"

"Before that, how did you know it was me? Can I also get your contact information? It's rather inconvenient that I have to call you on your room phone whenever I need to contact you."

"I suppose it is rather inconvenient that you don't have my contact information. I trust you, so I'm going to give you my information. Don't make me regret this decision."

"You won't, Horikita-san. Scouts' honor."

After hearing a sigh on the other end of the phone line, Horikita promptly provided me with her contact information, which I quickly typed into my phone.

"So, what was your reason for calling me Ayanokouji-kun? I already have my suspicions, but what is it that you wanted to talk about?"

Well, you've probably already gathered that it's regarding the idiot trio."

"I said as much earlier in the conversation. Can you get on with it? I'd rather you not waste my time. Hmm, perhaps you're just calling me because you wanted to get my contact information for nefarious purposes."

"Rather quick to try and convict me, aren't you? You put your trust in me, and you're already regretting your decision. At least give me a chance. This hardly seems fair."

"I suppose you have a point but I already feel regret in giving you my contact information. Perhaps if you give me some good news, I'll be willing to forgive you and apologize for my transgressions against you."

"..."

"What's wrong, Ayanokouji-kun? Why did you suddenly go silent on me? Surely you were able to convince a few dimwits? That task must be in the realm of your capabilities, or am I mistaken?"

"I wasn't able to convince any of the idiot trio, with Sudo reacting the worst and nearly choking me with my own tie."

"...Is that so?"

Despite me failing my objective set by Horikita, I could sense more of her anger directed towards Sudo than me, thankfully.

'Sorry Sudo, but it's better you than me.'

"I think we're going to have to tackle this from a different angle if we want to get these three onboard with teaching them."

"What are you suggesting?"

"You're not going to like it."

"..."

"Horikita?"

"...I feel like I'm going to regret saying this, but what do you have in mind?"

I could feel her annoyance grow and felt hesitation begin to bubble up, but quickly squashed it down and rushed ahead into the metaphorical lion's den awaiting me.

"I was planning on getting help from Kushida an-"

The phone line abruptly ended, giving me Horikita's answer to my plan. I heaved a sigh and put the phone on the receiver and stared up at the ceiling in anguish.

"You could've at least let me finish my sentence before hanging up."

After letting my thoughts air out loud, I moved my hand towards my phone, readying myself to call Horikita back with her newly entered contact information. As I picked my phone up, it suddenly pinged and I received an email from Horikita. I immediately opened the email and was met with an email that only contained "No" in the subject.

'You could at least let me send an email or call you first. Plus, I would appreciate it if you told me the extent of your esper powers because it's getting really annoying not knowing the full power of your abilities.'

I then called Horikita's number and held the phone up to my ear, patiently waiting for her to answer my call. After five rings, she finally picked up and I went to try and persuade her.

"Hori-"

"No"

I remained in my spot and slowly pulled my phone away from my ear and looked at it with a slight expression of disdain before releasing a heavy sigh, showing my annoyance at the situation.

Not long after my little outburst, I set to typing up an email in order to convince Horikita to let Kushida help us get the group together.

"Horikita-san, I am sorry for dropping my sudden plan on you, but we need to reach out to Kushida to help us. I don't want her in our group as much as you, but there is no other way to get those three together unless we get Kushida to help us. If you do say yes, then until the tests, I'll treat us to whatever you want until then. Every time we go out together, be it for ingredients or a set of clothes, I'll pay for the outing. How does that sound?"

I sent my email and patiently awaited Horikita's answer. Minutes ticked on by with no sign of an answer coming from Horikita. As I was about to set my phone down and begin brainstorming another plan, my phone suddenly pinged in my hand.

I spotted the email that Horikita sent and immediately opened its contents and began reading.

"While I'd rather not have Kushida join us, I will concede to your point that we will need her help in getting the three idiots together. But I don't expect her to stop at just getting those three together for us and will try to join the study group. Don't expect me to interact with her during our studies. You'll be responsible for any

conversation regarding Kushida. If she wants to speak to me or tell me a message or vice versa, everything will go through you. I also hope you're prepared for outings after every study session Kiyotaka."

'What did I get myself into?'

"Thank you for agreeing with me Suzune. Kushida gave me her contact information last month, so I'll message her and ask for her help in getting this study group together."

"Tell me how it goes. Also, if she asks for my contact information, be sure to deny her requests even if it means she won't get the study group together."

"Are you sure? That cou-"

"Yes."

"You know, it's rather rude to interrupt someone while they're typing."

"I'm aware, but why wait for your obvious question when I already know what you're going to say? Why waste time if it can be avoided."

"You're rather mean. You're lucky I enjoy your company so much, or else you'd be alone while attending this school."

"You say that as if you wouldn't be equally alone as me. Now go message Kushida and get this over with already. Also, for that insult, I'll be sure to milk your points dry after our first study session."

A jab was on the tip of my fingers as I was typing up a comeback, but I quickly stopped myself and switched to emailing Kushida to avoid digging myself a bigger hole with Horikita.

I backed out of the email app and made my way over to the desk where I had Kushida's contact information sitting on the corner of my desk. I picked up the slip of paper, entered the number that was on the slip, and gave Kushida a call.

It's better to just call her and rip this bandaid off quickly instead of trying to do this over text.'

After a handful of rings, the line goes dead with the speaker signaling that it went to voicemail. Forcing myself from preventing my hand from hitting my hand I sent Kushida a text telling her it's me and that I need to speak to her and waited for her to respond back.

'Why would she pick up a call from a random number that she hasn't entered in her phone. You sure thought that one out, didn't you.'

I took up a book from my desk, which turned out to be "The Tale of Genji," and I started reading it as I waited for Kushida's response.

Eventually, after me getting through a few pages, my phone began ringing, signaling my upcoming trial I was going to have to face. I grabbed my phone and answered while bringing my phone up to my ear while putting my book back on my desk.

"Ayanokouji-kun?"

"Yeah, it's me."

"Oh, awesome. I was wondering when you were going to text or call me Ayanokouji-kun. What did you need from me, Ayanokouji-kun? You said you needed to speak to me, so I was wondering what it was."

"I was trying to get a study group together with Ike, Sudo, and Yamauchi, so I was wondering if you could join because I asked them earlier and they all said no. I was hoping to get their grades up for the upcoming test."

"Is that so? I'm guessing Horikita-san is also going to be there since you were also struggling on the tests, Ayanokouji-kun. I can get the others together, but on one condition, I get to join the study group. So far I haven't made friends with you and Horikita-san since you two are distant and only speak to one another. So I hope you don't mind if I can use this as an opportunity to get closer to you two."

It's all right. Horikita will be informed that you are joining us, I'll make sure of it. We hope to conduct study groups at least every other day, if you can. So it would be best if you could persuade them to agree to those terms.

"Leave it to me Ayanokouji-kun. I can't wait to work together with you and Horikita-san."

"Yeah, same here Kushida-san. Email me when you get the others to join up.

"No problem, I'll get right on that for you, Ayanokouji-kun."

After that, the line ended and I let out a heavy sigh. Not soon after, I received a ping from my phone, which revealed an email from Kushida.

'She sure works fast, huh?'

Upon opening the email, I was greeted with good news from Kushida.

"I was able to convince Ike and Yamauchi. I'm currently working on getting Sudo to join us. Just leave it to me ٭(˘ˌ˘)٭."

'Guess that's the easy part done. Now all we need is Sudo and then having to actually get those three to sit down and willingly learn. What do you have planned Horikita because I doubt your usual way of doing things is going to work.'

A/N: So Season 2 huh. I'm really excited because of season 2 and because of that I got this chapter out. I promise the next chapter is going to be better. I just wanted to get this out since it's been so long and so I can get into the groove of writing again.

Man this new season is looking like it's going to be really good. But we all saw the jank in the trailer so I will continue to hold onto hope that this season is going to be good. Anyways I hope you guys enjoyed this chapter and hope you guys look forward to and enjoy the next chapter.

Also I have no impulse control and got another commission done. Hope you guys enjoy it and you can find the artist at:

<https://www.instagram.com/jeffuwnag/>



Chapter 17

Reads: 2282 | Votes: 75 | Comments: 16

The mood was tight and unpleasant, despite the fact that it was intended to be comradery. Suzune was staring holes in the people seated on the opposite side of the table as I turned to my left, and they were all watching with taut expressions that blended remorse, grief, and frustration.

I then looked to my right and was met with the visage of Kushida looking on with a smile on her face despite the circumstances. Seeing how her smile wasn't in the least bit strained.

'Does she have a limitless supply of optimism or is she enjoying this situation?'

Kushida had been assisting us throughout our study session, but I couldn't think of any advantages to her being here other than to approach the three people sitting across from us; Sudo was the only one she needed to approach since she already had the other two under control.

I turned my attention to Sudo, Ike, and Yamauchi across the table. They were all buried head-deep in problems Suzune had created to gauge their ability on different topics we covered today.

The three across from me were so exhausted that I thought they had been studying for many hours, even though we had been residing in the library for only ten minutes.

'If that were the case, I'm very confident one of them would implode, while the other two would be left as mindless drones, and it doesn't take a genius to figure out who's going to burst.'

I immediately turned my attention to Sudo, who was sitting across from Suzune. Due to his increasing frustration and tightening of his

muscles as he attempted to tackle the issue at hand, Sudo seemed as if he was ready to erupt in a fiery rage.

Being the attentive person she was, Kushida picked up on his increasing anger and addressed him with a calm and soothing tone to assuage his worries.

"You can skip questions if you need to, Sudo-kun. This is just to see what you retained from the study session today."

Sudo glanced up at Kushida with a startled expression, but instead of grinning at the out she offered him, he flashed a violent glare, and then he looked back down at his work while mumbling out an angry retort.

"Well, it doesn't accomplish shit when you can't comprehend anything written down, does it?"

Kushida gave Sudo an embarrassed smile and opened her mouth to try to cheer him up, but the other woman at the table quickly cut her off.

"Did you even pay attention for the whole of this session? I'm not sure whether you're that slow or just not paying attention. In any case, you rank among the most incompetent individuals I've ever known.

I couldn't help but stare in shock at the insults Suzune started hurling at Sudo. Suzune has impressively refrained from making any insults or underhanded remarks throughout the entire study session while genuinely attempting to impart knowledge to the three people seated across from us, so while it was surprising to see the harshness, it was also inevitable that such a situation would arise.

'Well all that effort just went to waste as the fruit of her labors is starting to quickly come crashing down in front of her.'

Sudo sprang up as I was finishing my thought, reaching across the table and grabbing Suzune by her necktie. Horikita made no effort to avoid the grip or recoil in response to its success, but I couldn't

help but feel my hackles raise and my body tighten as he did. The fact that the scenario in front of me didn't seem to be on the verge of escalating helped me restrain myself.

"What's your fucking problem, huh!? I came here to repay a favor to Kushida. I didn't sign up to get shit talked by someone like you while you insult me by giving me problems I can't solve."

"It's not my fault you can't solve simple equations and basic problem solving questions. I'm doing this so you have a chance to stay in the class, but it seems like this was a waste of time. However, I shudder to see what your future is like if this is the extent of your abilities."

"Tch, I don't really need to study anyway. Besides, I should only concentrate on my basketball career rather than my studies if I want a bright future. I can do it with basketball. Plus, focusing on basketball frees me up from having to deal with you."

After saying his piece Sudo roughly let go of Suzune's bow with a tsk and began packing up everything. Suzune looked on with her signature scowl on her face without making an effort to stop Sudo.

'Is this really okay? You've already put in all this effort, and you're just going to let him go with next to no chance of saving this if you let the bridge burn now.'

I couldn't help but feel disappointment in Suzune at the moment as she seems unwilling to change, 'Is this really going to be the limit of what you can do Suzune?'

Then, when Ike and Yamauchi shuffled in their seats and began packing up their belongings in a brief stillness, I closed my eyes and accepted the situation.

"Do you really expect that to work?"

I couldn't help but open my eyes and look over at Suzune, who seemed to find a reason to reach out to Sudo. 'Or to insult him one last time,' I couldn't help but muse to myself.

Sudo looked at Suzune with a newfound rage and opened his mouth to respond, but was swiftly cut off by Suzune saying, "How do you

expect to play basketball if you won't be attending school? Since you want to go pro, I would hazard a guess that you want to play overseas, especially since basketball here is not nearly as popular or lucrative as overseas. In that case, how are scouts supposed to find you if you don't play for a school? The fact that you play here at Koudo Ikusei means that your chances of getting scouted are exponentially higher. Are you willing to throw this opportunity away because you're too stubborn to improve your grades?"

Sudo froze under Suzunes continued glare after her words before his face once again seized up into a furry covered frown before yelling at Suzune, "Don't spout that bullshit at me! I can still go pro because how can anyone not take notice of my talent, it's obvious I'm made to go pro."

"Who will see your potential if you attend a no-name institution as opposed to a government-funded elite school that is so isolated off from the external world? Isn't attending such a school and becoming one of its top athletes the best way to attract attention to yourself?"

As he started processing Suzune's words, Sudo's forehead twitched noticeably, his scowl weathered just a little bit, and he appeared poised for another explosive outburst. Suddenly, Sudo crashed his fist into the table we were studying at, deciding to take a shuddering breath, and then sat down and pulled out his materials to finish the aptitude test he had been given earlier.

Everyone at the table looked on in shock except for Suzune herself, and I couldn't help but feel surprised at Suzune somehow getting through to Sudo and began applauding her in my head at the sudden turn of events.

Ike and Yamauchi, who were previously following Sudo's example and packing up their materials, began taking everything back out and began working on their test once more.

'Lost all the spine to leave as soon as Sudo was cowed, huh? I wonder if it's out of their respect for Sudo and siding with him or their fear for Suzune.'

I began observing the two who were previously in my thoughts and saw slight panic on their faces and minute trembling of their frames gave me my answer, 'I suppose it's the latter if those reactions are anything to go by.'

The three people in front of me got their exams going with renewed vigor. Ike and Yamauchi worked quickly and with a lot of tension, but Sudo was full of newly found determination while working on the paper in front of him.

As they completed their examinations, they slowly filed out of the library as time passed. Ike and Yamauchi quickly departed after inviting Kushida to hang around, which she awkwardly reflected, which seemed to pacify them. When Sudo had finished, he walked away with a sneer and a fog of rage and contemplation shrouding him.

What was left of our party stayed still at our table as we watched Sudo depart. As Suzune, Kushida, and I watched him leave, the air around us started to feel stiff and tense, and we could feel the tension surrounding us.

"You did a remarkably good job today Horikita-san. Especially with handling Sudo, for a second there I thought he was going to walk off but you were able to save it and keep him here. However, next time I think it'd be best to not insult the others in our group since it's not going to endear them to you."

Horkita didn't acknowledge Kushida with a response and continued to look at where Sudo's retreating form was. Despite the cold shoulder she was currently receiving, Kushida's signature smile was kept in place and she continued talking to Suzune, nonplussed by her silence.

"I'm quite confident in bringing them together for another session since they didn't leave, which indicates that they're still willing to work with you. When's the next time you're free, Horikita-san?"

Suzune continued to remain quiet before she finally turned her head and began leveling a glare at me.

"Eh, what did I do? I'm not even the one addressing you."

Her glare only sharpened at my words before responding to me, "We made a deal, didn't we? Unless you're a lowlife who breaks commitments, I expect you to honor it."

As I sat there, I was confused for a moment before I figured out what she meant. With the plan to discuss our future plans, I quickly turned to Kushida and said, "Horikita will let me know what time works for her. Almost any day is fine for me. We will schedule our next session on the day Horikita lets me know that is convenient for her."

Kushida looked on with a perplexed smile at me addressing her, "Why can't Horikita-san tell me that herself."

I gave a look to Suzune, who expectantly raised an eyebrow, and I let loose a sigh at her current eccentricities. "Horikita agreed to do this only if all contact between you two was through me as a middle man. I'm sorry for the inconvenience, but that was the condition for getting this study group together.

Kushida looked ready to argue but was interrupted by her phone pinging in her pocket, and she swiftly extracted her phone, reading the message she received. Her face morphed into a troubled expression for a moment before she quickly covered it up with her usual smile and began packing away her materials and standing up.

"Thank you, Horikita-san, Ayanokouji-kun, for having me and taking time out of your day to help those three. You two had no obligation to help them, but you clearly have compassion for your fellow classmates and I hope to bring that out more as the year progresses."

After her words, she gave a bow before swiftly departing without sparing a glance back at us.

After Kushida exited the library Suzune let out a sigh of exhaustion next to me before looking around the empty library and slumping into her seat beside me.

"You alright Suzune?"

"I am, just give me a moment. I'm rather drained after having to teach those idiots while dealing with Kushida's presence. The only silverlining is that you didn't cause me any stress, except at the end when you acted like someone drilled a hole into your memories."

After the hard effort she's had to put in over the last several hours, I decided to be merciful and allow her this time to recover and gather herself. I believe she's earned a break, particularly since she went against her customary grain and offered an olive branch towards Sudo, covered in thorns as though it may be.'

I fished out my phone in my pocket to find the time and decided that she had enough time to rest and began carefully shaking her shoulder.

"The library is about to close. I think it's time for us to go. How does following through on my promise and treating you tomorrow sound?"

Suzune leveled a glare at me due to the initial contact before it began taking on a satisfied tone towards me treating her tomorrow. She began lethargically packing up her belongings with me following suit as she gave me her confirmation, "Glad to see I don't need to remind you about that portion of the deal. It seems your mind is not as tarnished as I thought it was."

"Why do you insult me even when I do something nice towards you?"

She leveled a stare at me before she began nervously fidgeting. She then stood up and began walking towards the exit, with me following suit. We continued on our way out of the library in silence, and she finally responded as we were halfway through the journey towards our dorms.

"When we do our verbal sparring, it's rather enjoyable for me. It's a time where I can practice my vernacular while having a conversation with someone whose company I enjoy."

"I'm rather touched that you regard our conversations so highly."

"It's only natural. You're the only person that I deem worthy enough to keep up with me in conversation. Plus, you're the only person I see worthy of giving up my personal time to."

I couldn't help but widen my eyes at her rather heartfelt words. Despite the rather serious nature of her words, she kept her face forward, purposely avoiding eye contact with me.

"While I also enjoy our verbal sparring, can you make an effort and talk without those jabs tomorrow while we're out together? You're not obligated, of course, but I would appreciate it if you could put in the effort to converse with me without any insults.

Suzune gave me a quick glance, which revealed her sporting a rather vulnerable face, before turning her face forwards once more and responding in a meek voice, "I make no promises, but I'll try for you, Kiyotaka."

I couldn't help but feel a bubble of happiness in my chest at her words and kept her in the corner of my eye as a minute smile curled up at the edge of my mouth.

A/N: So. I'm not dead. Long time no see. This has been a chapter I've been working on rather sporadically, so I hope you guys enjoy this chapter and it is up to snuff with the rest of the story.

I make no promises on a chapter in the near future since I'm in the final stretch of my current semester in college and recently it was one of the few times I wasn't writing an essay and found

the motivation to write a story.

Anyway, Season 2, huh? I have rather mixed feelings. While I enjoyed it a lot, I did have problems with it. It's only made me realize that they're taking too few episodes to tell the story of COTE. To get the same impact you get from the LN's they definitely need to stretch out the show, especially to give the proper side characters a chance to shine since they end up missing a lot of development and story beats, which end up flat and coming up short.

And the less said about the whole sports festival arc, the better. You could've convinced me the entire section was basic anime filler and I would've believed you when it was a rather major part of the story in the LN due to Class D losing that bit of hope to catch up with the other classes due to how hard Class C was fucking with them. Despite these flaws, however, I still love the show because I love COTE, but I do wish it was handled better.

Anyways, thank you everyone for continuing to support this story of mine, and I can't express enough gratitude to the support and success this story has gotten. When I uploaded this I never would've expected it to reach the heights that it has. 25K Views and 1.2K favorites far surpasses any and all expectation I had for this story so once again thank you from the bottom of my heart. Your support is what helps me keep going and reinvigorate the love I have not only for COTE but for writing in general.

Well, that's enough ranting. Thank you again, everyone, and I hope you all have a good rest of your day after reading this.

Chapter 18

Reads: 1843 | Votes: 61 | Comments: 20

I couldn't sleep, I can't put my finger as to why it was the case but it was. I was currently spread out across my bed with my eyes fixed to my plaster covered ceilings counting the imperfections and seeing how many patterns I could make out.

"Must be the stress of the past few days catching up to me finally. Just wish it didn't manifest in the form of me laying like a starfish stuck to the side of a rock."

Stirring in silence for a few heartbeats after I spoke aloud I felt one of my fingers twitch restlessly and resolutely peeled myself from my bed to break my tension. I shuffled my way to my desk chair and shrugged on my uniform from earlier in the day over my night shirt and shorts.

After giving my jacket a slight adjustment and pulling my tie even looser than what I normally wear, I began to make my way to the door to my room before exiting.

After waiting a moment for the automatic lock on my door to click shut I began making my way down the hallway with my hands in my pants pocket hiding the subtle twitch in my fingers from my newfound restlessness.

Despite having no reason for my feelings to bother me let alone emerge as they have, I couldn't help but feel like I was walking to the executioner's block after I called the elevator to my floor and slowly watched the elevator tick down from the 13th floor down to mine.

The jittering in my finger began to spread to two more on the same hand as I felt the hairs on the back of my neck prickle.

'What's happening to me? It's not like my judgment is rapidly approaching me.'

The doors to the elevator soon pinged with what sounded like the trumpeter heralding the end times as the elevator doors began to open as the gates of hell were a breath away with the horsemen coming to take their due.

Before the doors could finish opening the unease in my body began to shift from my hands to my chest as I saw the sole occupant of the elevator who was...

"Horikita?"

My voice, while it didn't quiver or shake in surprise, was a few octaves higher than it usually was. Not enough to be noticeable to anyone who wouldn't regularly interact with me. I could immediately tell the difference.

As I began to fully take in the appearance of Suzune across from me, the frayed nature my nerves were already in began to reach a fever pitch as I saw the expression she was currently wearing.

Vulnerable and uncertain marred her features before it shifted to shock and panic as she registered my voice and appearance before her body followed suit and stiffened in place in lieu of a vocal response. The usually confident and headstrong Suzune, I've come to know, was currently wearing a deer in the headlights look with a light tinge of horror due to the widening of her eyes and dilation of pupils as she stared back at me.

Despite my confusion and a sense of worry beginning to filter through my body I couldn't open my mouth to address her and Suzune looked to be in no state to do the same.

Then as if heralding the end to our conversation the gong of the elevator sounded and began to close. With a slight widening of my eyes in surprise I quickly shot my foot out to halt the elevator. As my foot sat there over the border of the elevator the doors showed no signs of stopping and began to enclose upon my leg.

With an internal curse I pulled my leg back through into the hallway and watched as Suzune continued to wear a surprised look on her features as the elevator doors closed and began its descent to one of the lower levels.

With an internal curse I began to glide over the hallway floor and make my way to the stairway and began to make a rapid descent to the ground floor. As I traveled through the pristine stairway that had unrusted guardrails and smooth yet pointed stairs steps I began to parse as to what could be bothering Suzune to the extent I saw.

'My best bet is to make it to the lobby and check the CCTV monitor down there to see which floor she gets off on and go from there.'

With my thoughts whirling around my head I continued my descent and soon made my way to the lobby floor and when I exited the stairway I flickered my gaze to the elevator that already dropped off its cargo due to the floor display panel reading the carriage being on the first floor.

After giving a swift once over the other elevator shafts and confirming that none of them were currently in movement I made my way to the CCTV monitor behind the main desk near to the entrance to the dorms.

Gazing at as many of the monitors as I could I found Suzune on one of the cameras which showed her to be right outside the dorm building with her somehow looking even meeker than before with her constantly looking over her shoulder no doubt checking to see if I was following her.

A part of me, likely still untouched by the school, wants me to turn back to my room and return to futilely trying to sleep. Another much larger and louder part of me wants me to follow Suzune especially due to the restlessness I was feeling earlier.

Focusing back on the monitors I saw the frame of Suzune leave the frame of a camera that I knew was going to take her to the side of the dorm that had a blindspot right where a vending machine was.

With a renewed surge of restlessness I halted further thoughts and

began exiting the dorms and tracking echoes of Suzune's steps to her current destination.

As I began approaching the vending machine I began to slow my steps to a crawl and focused on my hearing. As I got closer to the vending machine I began to pick up conversation between what increasingly became more obvious to be Suzune and another voice I haven't heard before.

"Suzune. I didn't think you'd follow me all the way here."

Freezing for a moment as I approached the corner I soon pushed past my surprise and began peering around the corner with Suzune's back towards me with a boy towering over her oozing a layer of utter contempt at her. I couldn't help but feel my nerves fray over the way he was currently viewing and talking down on Suzune. While she does have room to grow he sees her as less than hindrance like he's stepping over an ant pile. A moment of annoyance before disregarding the event from your mind right afterwards.

"Hmph. I'm far different from the useless girl you once knew, niisan. I came here to catch you"

'Niisan? So this is the person who your confidence and self-assuredness crumples in the face of?'

Straining further from around the corner I was unable to make out any recognizable features of her so-called brother.

"I heard you were placed in Class D. I suppose nothing has really changed in the last three years. You've always been fixated on following me, and as a result you don't notice your own flaws. Choosing to come to this school was a mistake."

Suzune took in his harsh words and began to refute in a weak voice that sounded unconvincing to my ears despite the thick layer of desperation her words were coated with.

"That's... You're wrong about that. I'll show you. I'll reach Class A right away, then--"

"It's pointless. You will never reach Class A. In fact, your class will fall apart soon enough. Things at this school aren't as simple as you think."

"I will definitely, definitely reach—"

"I told you, it's pointless. You really are a disobedient little sister."

As Suzune began to close in on herself due to constantly being cut off by her brother, he took a step towards her which was plain to see in spite of my obscured view.

I have yet to meet this person that I now knew was Suzune's brother and I could see the family resemblance in the aloof expression he wore despite its clear layer of disinterest. It was like he was staring at an uninteresting object. He then grabbed Suzune by the wrist to which she offered no resistance and pushed her against the wall.

My already frayed nerves began to fragment further as I saw the scene happen before me, and before I could stop myself I swiftly exited my hiding spot and swiftly grabbed the wrist he was using to restrain Suzune against the wall.

"What? How..?" He stared at his arm and slowly turned to me with a sharp gleam in his eye.

"K-kiyotaka?!" Despite seeing me a few moments prior to this current situation Suzune must have already forgotten the event in her rush to meet her brother if the level of surprise she's currently showing isn't a farce.

"That's an excessive amount of force to use against your sister don't you think? I doubt anyone would walk upon this situation and see it as an ordinary sibling spat."

"Eavesdropping is not an admirable quality."

"When someone I know is potentially in harm's way I consider it utterly justifiable."

"Release me at once, this is a family matter that doesn't require any outside influence."

"I'll take the time to learn from my mistakes and begin to mind my own business after you release her," my words were accompanied with a pointed stare that I refused to break with the elder Horikita.

"S-stop it, Kiyotaka, please," Horikita begged!? Her voice was hoarse and wavered as she struggled to get out her words.

Reluctantly, I released her brother. Instantly, he tried to backhand me in the face. I instinctively took a step back to avoid it and swatted his hand away to further the distance. For such a lightly built guy, he was a nasty attacker. He then aimed a sharp kick at my unguarded midsection that was opened up due to my earlier parry.

I shifted my body sideways and stepped into his guard and positioned my right foot towards his still planted foot and brought up my elbow to leverage him over my foot as he was now out of position. His earlier skill was quickly proven as he swiftly skirted over my foot and brought his leg back in while quickly setting up his guard expecting a counter attack.

Now with myself standing as an obstacle between him and Suzune I began to physically lower my guard but keeping my senses on high alert prepared to act if he wanted to continue our skirmish.

"Good reflexes. I didn't imagine you could evade all of my blows so quickly. Also, you seemed to understand quite well what I was trying to do and had a feel for the flow of the fight. How long and what have you been taught?:

After the attacks stopped, the questions began with the same swift ferocity Horikita's brother has already showcased to have.

"I was taught piano and calligraphy, it helped me hone my reflexes and preciseness. Also, when I was in elementary school, I won a national music competition."

The elder Horikita began eyeing me with a calculating look trying to weigh the net balance my personhood was worth taking in as much of the information I had given him both from the question and the fight. After seemingly finding what he was looking for he

glanced over my shoulder to the timid Suzune who was gripping the back of my blazer.

"You're in Class D aren't you. It would explain why you know my miserable sister in the first place. What a unique boy you've met Suzune."

After addressing his sister with the most amount of courtesy I've heard from him he then turned his full attention to me.

"Unlike Suzune, I'm pretty incompetent. I just follow what she tells me and help her as best as I can."

"Suzune, is this boy your friend? I'm honestly surprised."

In lieu of answering Suzune tightened her grip on my blazer before giving a caution glance towards her brother and giving a meek nod.

"I suppose you're not the complete waste that I thought you were. You're actually taking steps to improve yourself. And you, Kiyotaka. With you around, things might get interesting. Especially with the way you've been affecting that sister of mine."

Restraining myself from reacting to the outright dismissal of Suzune as if she wasn't directly behind me I watched as he began to swiftly make his exit as if he didn't just commit an act of violence against my person and verbally assaulting his sister before also using violence against her.

With her brother gone, the night was silent once more. Suzune's form collapsed against my form and I felt her resting on the back of my neck.

'Maybe I made things worse by getting involved, but I can't find it in myself to care at the moment.'

I was content to stay there until Suzune found it in herself to move again but I was met with a shallow voice behind me with the air of Suzune's breath brushing against the back of my neck.

"How much did you hear?"

Without hesitating I answered truthfully, "From when he said 'I didn't think you'd follow me all the way here' and everything afterwards until I made my entrance."

Suzune fell silent once again after my words and her form seemed to somehow press on my even harder than before as if any vestige of power she was using to keep off of my form completely vanished.

"Are you okay Suzune? You didn't seem to be as put together as you usually are from the elevator until now."

Her grip on my form suddenly tightened before she answered me, "I-i called him out to this spot through one of his classmates shortly after we left the library. Needless to say I wasn't prepared for the encounter despite how much I tried to convince myself that I was and-and..."

Instead of forcing her to continue I gave a quiet sigh that while wasn't audibly picked up by Suzune it felt as if her form was still sprawled across my back as the sigh of exhaustion reverberated across my form. I then crouched before lifting her legs up in my arms putting her in a piggyback ride. I was rewarded with a soft and exhausted sounding noise of surprise before her arms suddenly bolted from being taut at her sides to enclosing around my shoulders.

"Let's get you back to the dorm Suzune. You've had an eventful night as is."

I could feel a protest build in her throat from her on my back but it was suddenly halted which turned into a sigh as Suzune's body once more went slack against mine as she began to once more rest against my back.

While I had plenty of questions I wanted to ask her and she more than likely also had in turn I settled for getting them at a later date, something which Suzune seemed to agree with me as she didn't have an ounce of resistance as I was carrying her through the lobby and into the elevator as I pushed the button for her floor.

We both passed the ride in silence with the only interruption of the

monotony being Suzune shifting on my back as I heard her dig through one of her pockets. Soon after the elevator dinged for her floor of the dorms and as I exited the elevator carriage I felt my weight shift as Suzune leaned on her right and I swiftly walked into her weight and began heading down the left side of the hallway from the elevator.

As I was making my way down the hallway I felt a sudden tug on my blazer and I swiftly stopped at the second door to the last at the end of the hallway. The number written on the plaque was 1159.

When I stopped I felt a shuffle of movement from Suzune and it was clear that she was trying to extract herself from my back and I slowly lowered myself into a crouch to let her get off. I took a careful step away from the door to give her access to the handle so she could scan her ID to get into her room. As she did she tentatively opened her door and began stepping through the boundary separating her room to the hallway.

After she had enough room to close the door with her in it I gave her my farewells.

"Goodnight Suzune, I'll see you tomorrow," after giving her my piece I took the the initiative and began to turn to make my way back to the elevator to try and get off the floor as soon as possible to avoid any potential rumors that may arise from me being on one of the girl floors let alone me carrying Suzune up to her dorm room.

As I took a step I was met with resistance coming from my blazer sleeve and I turned and saw an extremely red Suzune looking towards the ground unable to meet my eyes.

"K-k-kiyotaka if y-you can. C-c-can you s-stay w-with me ton-n-night?"

At her words my eyes dilated in surprise and I felt a lump settle in my throat while a heavy feeling began sitting in my chest that sucked the breath out of me like a vacuum. I stood there stupefied with an aloof expression on my face before giving her my response.

A/N: Well, well, well. This has been a long time coming. I'm

not dead which is probably surprising for a great deal of you. Considering this is my comeback chapter after so long I hope you guys enjoyed this chapter and I hope there wasn't a drop in quality since the last chapter I uploaded which was over a year ago now.

Thank you to everyone who's stuck with this and has not only been patiently waiting but asking for more. I've been in the mood to write so expect a few more chapters coming soon. I usually don't say that and follow up with a don't get your hopes up but I guarantee this won't be a one time thing as I will definitely have more to write for you all.

Anyways now that I got my characteristic rambling out of the way I hope you guys enjoyed the chapter and thanks to everyone who's a fan of this work you're the reason I've come back to this at all. Knowing there's literally hundreds of people who've seen and enjoyed my work is always insane to think about and you guys are the best motivation for me to keep going.

Until next time.

~UnluckyRoll

Chapter 19

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My body was stiff.

When I initially started to wake up, that was my first thought. I experienced bone-deep fatigue for the first time in a long time, which led to stray thoughts of remaining in bed and sleeping all day. I knew something was wrong with me even though it felt like a lifetime had passed since I had such ideas, much less entertained them.

But after last night, I already knew something was wrong with me with how I acted with Horikita. After all that time at that place, I thought I knew who I was and what I was, but I was wrong. The entire point of my being here at this school was to get away from that place. I have no reservations as to what kind of person I am; I was molded to be what I am today, after all. Yet despite that, I did something that went against the person I've become since I've left that place.

There was a tightness in my chest that contrasted with the shockingly irregular heartbeat, and I had a sensation of dread that was both figurative and actual. I can't blame myself since I acted utterly out of character and against my values, no matter how warped they may be. I haven't lost my cool like this in a long time.

The weight on my chest grew in pressure, and I couldn't help but take a deep breath to try and stabilize myself and my ordinary behavior and reactions. Slowly, I counted to five in my head before breathing in and holding the breath for another five before releasing a bone-rattling exhale.

Feeling the weight on my chest suddenly shift, I knew it was time for me to get up and face the day as I realized my mind began playing tricks on me and staying in my current position would only

spiral me further down, whatever my current state is.

Slowly opening my eyes, I was greeted by the white plaster ceiling that was in every dorm room. I emptily raked my eyes over the patterns in the plaster before putting a hand on the source of the weight that was on my chest and giving it a push, knocking it to the ground.

Once I heard the thump of its fall, I sat up in my bed and glanced down at the pillow that somehow found itself on my chest in the middle of the night. I'm really out of it if I can't remember me putting it there last night or because I tossed and turned in my sleep, which resulted in my pillow somehow stationing itself on my chest, and I can't figure out which would be a worse scenario.

Looking around my room, I was met with the usual appearance of my room, with the only exception being the pile of clothes that was my blazer, undershirt, and pants, which were haphazardly tossed onto the ground. Keeping my stare on my clothing for a moment with disdain while thinking of needing to clean up my mess, I turned my head to my bed stand, which had my phone laying on it, and picked it up to check the time.

After reaching for my phone and turning it on, the time read 6:24. I'm definitely off balance if I've woken up this early. Not to mention the exhaustion I'm feeling, which has to be from mental fatigue, but the fact that yesterday affected me that much is rather worrying. Hah, no use sitting here and continuing to worry about it; I need to keep myself busy until it's time for classes.

With a sense of motivation that's breaking through my current mental fog, I extradited myself from my bed and began to workout with a series of stretches before moving into burpees, situps, mountain climbers, and leg raises. While not the most taxing of my workouts, I did enough of them for the next hour, which helped build up a healthy sheen of sweat on my body before I decided it was enough and made way for my shower.

After cleaning myself and giving myself a mental reminder to buy more shampoo, I got myself ready for the day and brushed my teeth after drying myself off. After making sure I was properly groomed, I

exited the bathroom and put up the clothes I had sprawled on the floor from the night before. In my laundry basket, I put them in the corner of my room and got a new set of my school uniform from my dresser.

Promptly, I began to get myself dressed and began to get ready to take on the day, which, while I was not dreading it, I was not looking forward to. Heaving yet another sigh that I knew wasn't going to be the last of the day, I smoothed out my uniform, shouldered my bag, and then grabbed my phone, which was still where it was earlier by my bed stand, and exited my room while promptly locking it behind me.

Making my way down the hallway, the emptiness and silence of my surroundings only served to leave me alone with my thoughts, which was the last thing I needed at the moment. To try and distract myself, I began matching who I knew lived on this floor with the room numbers. It was a rather easy process as I memorized who lives on this floor, so it was a pointless exercise in futility, but I did it regardless as I made my way to the elevator.

After double and triple checking who lived on this floor, I finally arrived at the elevator and called the elevator, which only took a few moments to arrive and opened to an empty carriage. Stepping through, I hit the button for the lobby and was ready to face the day.

-Break-

The trip to 1D was surprisingly dull. I'm used to running into someone on my way to class, but today I was blessed with making my way to the classroom unimpeded. Despite my good luck, I couldn't help but feel as if it was foreboding that something bad was going to happen to me.

As I was faced with the door to class 1-D, I placed my hand on the door handle, which was cool to the touch, which brought to my attention just how warm my hands actually were. Despite this, I opened the door, which was accompanied by a harsh squeak, showing the poor maintenance the door has received.

Upon opening the door, I was met with a small handful of glances of students taking note of who arrived, with everyone quickly returning to what they were doing afterwards, with not a signal glance staying on me from Kushida to Ike and Yamauchi.

Continuing my observation, I also noticed Hirata, who glanced at me before giving me a smile and returning to his conversation with Karuizawa, who gave me a brief glance when she noticed Hirata greeted me. When she gave me a quick once over, she gave a silent scoff accompanied by an eye roll before returning to energetically talking about her upcoming plans for the weekend with Hirata.

What am I doing? I'm putting it off for as long as I can; it's about time I faced the music and what an ugly and distorted piece of music it's going to be. Turning my head towards my desk, I was met with Horikita, nose deep in a book, with her usual scowl and look of perpetual distaste that was somehow marred with disdain that was certainly meant to be directed at me.

The steps I took to my desk felt heavy and tense with the closer I got, somehow applying more and more pressure upon me as I got closer and closer to my desk and, by extension, Horikita. I thought about stopping and dressing Horikita, but I figured that would be a bad move, especially while we're still in class. We're both private people, so I doubt she'll be standing at her desk while I address her, which would undoubtedly track attention that we're both looking to avoid.

Despite passing Horikita, while her complete attention was still focused on her book, I couldn't help but feel a cold chill run up my back while my hands felt warm and sweaty. Despite this, I took my seat as normal and promptly unpacked what I needed for the first class of the day, which was going to be English.

Looking over at Horikita, she's refused to look at me, let alone address me, since I walked into the classroom, and she seems to want to stick to this tactic of ignoring me for as long as I'll let her. Considering if I don't try to talk to her until after class or lunch, she'll continue to do this, so I'm going to have to reach out for an invitation if I'm to get her to talk to me.

"Hey, Horikita, can you find some time to talk with me later today so we can talk about what happened last night?" Undesirably and frustratingly, Horikita kept her gag order in place and continued to ignore me. Somehow, our relationship has regressed to something even worse than the first day we met. Back then, she gave me more of her time than what's happening now. Knowing this was going to be a war of attrition, I once again tried to reach out to Horikita. "After what happened last night, I think there are some things that we need to clear up and clarify between the two of us."

"What's there to clarify?" Horikita quickly spat back with venom in her voice while glaring at me out of the corner of her eye before continuing with her features morphing into a deep scowl. "You made your intentions pretty clear last night." The more she spoke, her features started to take on the visage of a snarl as she began turning her head further and further to me the further she went. "After last night, I don't think there was anything to misinterpret. I'd rather you not try to test my patience but blatantly disrespect my intelligence. It's rather unbecoming but not unexpected of such a thick-witted person as yourself."

"Since you're so scathing in your remarks, this is why I think it would be best if we were to discuss last night. If we were to just leave things as they were last night without talking to one another, things would only grow colder between the two of us, and I'd rather not have that happen." My hesitancy towards the end was rather abnormal for me, and I wanted to kick myself for slipping as I did, yet apparently that was the best thing I could've done because, for the first time since I've arrived, Horikita had a change in her expression, which was a mixture of shock and surprise. She must've finally processed my words and how much I meant them, as instead of continuing to lay into me, she took a pause and moved backwards before looking me over.

This continued on for a few seconds that felt as if they stretched into minutes with her observing me from head to toe with me keeping my stoic mask upon my face while her eyes searched for something that I couldn't pinpoint. Eventually she must've finally found what she was looking forward to, as she closed her eyes and stood still for a moment as if thinking before giving a small,

resolute nod before addressing me. "If you're so desperate to reconcile yourself with me, then I have no problem watching you try to grovel in apology to me later. Also, you're going to treat me later while we do."

I couldn't help but feel a tick of annoyance at her attitude and conditions, but I knew this was the best I was going to get out of this situation, and the idea of ignoring this olive branch no matter how burned and disfigured it was left an ashen taste in my mouth.

"I have no problems with the conditions you've put forth. Thank you for indulging me and I'll be sure to not waste your time for hearing me out." My words seemed to be the correct thing to say as she didn't start glaring daggers at me after the fact and instead her face was set back into her neutral frown and returned to her book and stayed like that until Chabashira showed up and began to teach the class.

-Break-

Classes seemed to drag on for an eternity, but eventually lunch rolled around, and without sparing me a glance, Horikita swiftly exited her seat and began making her way outside of the classroom, and I followed her on her way out. I fell in step right behind her and kept my eyes focused on her. I have no idea where she plans on taking us, but if she's choosing the place we'll be dining at, it must be something she's been looking forward to wanting to indulge in but didn't want to spend her own money on. With how frugal I know her to be, this seems to fit where she plans on going.

As we continued to walk in silence, I couldn't help but think back to last night, when I rebuked Horikita's proposition. Why I declined her, I have no idea. It's what's been bothering me all day since the moment I woke up this morning. Why I chose not to accept her advances continues to elude me.

Why didn't I jump at the opportunity to have her wrapped around my finger? It was the perfect opportunity to make sure she fell for me, given how vulnerable she was last night. It was the perfect opportunity to manipulate her and be her metaphorical knight in shining armor last night. I would've been there to comfort her

through the night, and she has come to trust me to a great extent.

Yet, a bad taste fills my mouth thinking about doing that to Suzune. Manipulating her like I've done countless times before seems so

Cruel.

And that's where I'm so confused and distraught. Why her? Why do I feel this way when I think about using her to further my goals or just to convince her to leave me alone? That's the reason why I'm here in the first place—to live a life unfettered by outside influences and to live life how I want to live it. Associating with Suzune will only pull that future further and further from me, which is already being showcased in the encounter I had with her brother last night. After last night, I'm definitely going to be on his radar, and that will only invite trouble along with Suzunes single-mode goal to catch up with her brother and reach Class 1-A.

Suzune may not be willing to drag the entire class kicking and screaming to 1-A, but she's definitely willing to drag me with her. Again, despite that benign and complete antecedent to my existence, I can't help but feel joy. No, that's too strong for what I'm feeling. Content maybe? Again, I'm not sure, but the fact that I'm not revolted by helping Suzune, even if it means being dragged along like a dog on a leash, is concerning. Especially the fact that I had a prime opportunity to manipulate her. I passed it up. Hopefully this conversation with Suzune will help me realize why I've suddenly turned over this new leaf and gone against what I've known all my life.

Suzune wears too much of her heart on her sleeve to be as deceitful as me, let alone be anyone but herself, so why am I so pulled to her and willing to give her a level of respect despite all the flaws I see in her? I just don't get it.

Well, I guess now's the time I'm going to get answers to my questions. Suzune and I finally made our way to our destination, which was a quaint coffee shop that I hadn't heard of called LeBlanc. In comparison to the popular coffee chain we have on campus, this place seemed to be pretty sparse, with no one else inside the establishment except for us and the owner when we

made our way inside.

After taking a booth in the corner of the store as far from the owner as we could, Suzune and I each ordered a house blend, with Suzune going further to order a plate of curry for her lunch. I declined to get anything as I didn't need my wallet to be even lighter after this excursion than it needs to be. While we waited for our coffee to be made, I couldn't help but think of the odd combination of serving coffee and curry together, especially when you advertise your shop as a coffee establishment. The owner would definitely see more success if he marketed this place as a diner, but from the gruff appearance of the owner, I get the feeling she prefers the empty atmosphere his shop carries.

Suzune and I patiently waited and stared at the owner making our respective coffees without any lick of conversation passing between us. Eventually our orders arrived while the owner went back to behind his bar and into the kitchen to start working on the serving of curry for Suzune.

"So, Ayanokouji, what reason did you have to walk off and humiliate me last night?"

Getting right into it, huh? I wouldn't expect anything else from such a strong-willed girl as her. "After everything that happened that night before you asked me," I was met with a glare but continued on with my piece, "To join you, I realized that you probably weren't in the right mind at the time, so I refused."

Suzune's glare only seemed to double as a red flush of rage began building on her forehead. "Oh, so what you're saying is that I was a fool for even thinking of asking you, and that I'm so weak that I'd need you for comfort?"

"Yes." Suzune's eyes widened at my immediate reply, and I pushed on and continued my attack, as I knew this was the only way that I would be able to reach the thick-headed person that is Suzune.

"I saw how distraught you were last night, and I would've accepted your proposition if you weren't in such a state. Knowing that you were saying that in the heat of the moment deterred me from

joining you, as I didn't want to abuse the trust that you've given me."

I couldn't help but feel my eyebrows raise involuntarily at my confession. Focusing on Suzune, she had a similar reaction to mine and was shocked to hear my reasoning just as much as I was. Is that why I've been acting as I've been? Trust. Such a simple yet novel concept for me. Having had to dance to the tunes of Darwin and his philosophy all of my life, trust was a very hard thing to come by, as I've known everyone for themselves for all my life, along with the other people I've known. Well, except for her. She was the only exception from that place, and now Suzune shares that place with her. But why? They're not anything alike, and yet she's an exception to how I treat people. Why is that the case? Maybe it's because Suzune is so unapologetically herself. She strives to be the best person she can be, with the only thing holding her back being how she chases after her brother and wishes to be acknowledged by him. Despite that, she lives life how she wants to live it, and I suppose I can't help but admire that.

"Why was not breaking this precious trust so important to you? And what if I saw your rejection as a bigger breach of trust by rejecting my invitation of trust towards you?"

"Then I owe you an apology if that's the case. I'd rather ask for permission now for us to do it today or sometime in the future than ask for forgiveness after accepting your proposal last night. With how clouded your mind was last night, you were desperate and were hoping for a form of comfort, and I was your best and most convenient option at the time."

Suzune's dying glare once again resurfaced as I seemed to step on a landmine with my words. "So you're saying I only offered you because it was convenient to me? Since you think I would invite anyone back to my room regardless of how I know them, you must be more damaged than I thought if you thought I was that kind of girl. I can see why you didn't accept it now because you must look at me with disdain if you have that view of me."

"That's not what I meant at all; if you had another manner of destressing, such as eating, you would've taken it. We can both stop

pretending like yesterday didn't deeply affect you. I won't press you on any of the details, but that encounter with your brother clearly shook you. You're a strong person, Suzune, and last night I saw a completely different person, one who was vulnerable and timid, completely unlike the person I've come to know since coming to this school. The Suzune, that's currently glaring at me, and the one I've gotten to know is the Suzune I'm most familiar with, so seeing that other you was jarring and worrying."

"What am I supposed to be then? An impenetrable wall that's supposed to not react to anything at all and to recklessly rush ahead?"

"No, what I'm trying."

"Here's the order for the young lady and another plate for the gentleman." I was interrupted by the owner suddenly placing two plates down, one in front of both Suzune and me.

"I didn't order any food; I just ordered the coffee."

"Well, consider this one in the house since I didn't want to see you starve yourself in my store. It would be bad for business if any new customers walked in and saw a twig like you looking miserable because you refused to eat."

I could only raise an eyebrow at the man's words and actions, but a soft snort rang out from across the table, and I saw Suzune covering her mouth with her fist, trying to look as sophisticated as possible despite letting out such an uncouth noise. My state seemed to only redouble her laughs as she struggled to keep them in. I could only sigh in frustration and look down at my lateness before looking back up at the owner, who gave me an encouraging nod to eat before walking off back to the kitchen.

Taking the escape for what it was, I began to eat the curry that was set down in front of me, and I couldn't help but appreciate how good the food tasted. I took a look across the table to see what my dining mate thought of it.

Her slender fingers lift a spoonful of vibrant curry to her lips, and as

the rich, aromatic blend of spices touches her tongue, a transformation occurs. The stern façade cracks, revealing a momentary glimpse of pure, unadulterated delight. Her eyes light up, the red hues shimmering like embers in a dying fire, and a soft, almost imperceptible smile tugs at the corners of her mouth.

The warmth of the curry spreads through her, and for a brief, precious moment, she is not the distant, untouchable beauty. She is Suzune, a girl finding joy in the simple pleasure of a well-prepared meal. Her slim but well-endowed form shifts slightly, a subtle, graceful movement as she savors each bite, the spices dancing across her palate in a symphony of flavor.

She is a picture of contrasts: the stern look that guards her emotions, now softened by culinary bliss; the delicate pink bow braided into her hair that speaks of hidden tenderness amidst her stoic exterior. Suzune's beauty is not just in her appearance but also in these fleeting moments of vulnerability, where the armor slips and the true depth of her character shines through.

Despite my words earlier, I couldn't help but realize my folly in calling her out on how vulnerable she was last night when moments like this were showcased to me. While I don't regret turning her down yesterday, I do regret telling her indirectly that I thought less of her when she's not the confident and strong girl I've come to know. Her flaws don't seem like flaws at all in this moment, because they aren't. It's just the many facets of her that she lives by. This side of her is just more hidden than the other parts that I've had the pleasure of seeing.

As she continued to eat, I couldn't help but take her appearance in. She held a serene figure amidst the swirling haze of steam and spices. Her long black hair cascades down her back like a silken waterfall, save for her meticulously crafted braid tied with that delicate pink bow, a stark contrast to her otherwise stern demeanor. Gradient red eyes, intense and enigmatic, usually hold an unwavering gaze, softening while she eats.

As I slowly began to pick away at my food, I unconsciously let a smile slip, unbeknownst to Suzune, and the only one noticing was the store's owner giving us a grandfatherly smile from a distance.

A/N: So yeah I'm back. I have a scene cooked up that I want to write so that's why I got the motivation to write and get this chapter out. The scene I want to write probably won't be another chapter two or three chapters. I've been writing it in advance and it'll easily be the best chapter of this story and I'm really excited to get it published.

Anyways hope you guys enjoyed this chapter, sorry to keep you waiting, and as always thank you for the love and support on this story and I hope whenever you're reading this you have a good rest of your day/night.

-UnluckyRoll